May 1987

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Chronicles

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

SINGERS of TALES

...or how to rescue storytelling from sex and bureaucrats

V. S. NAIPAUL ON BEING A WRITER

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A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE
Vol. 11, No. 5 May 1987

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A Publication of
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CHRONICLES (ISSN 0887-5731) is published monthly for $21 per year by The Rockford Institute, 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103-7061. Second-class postage paid at Rockford, IL and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *CHRONICLES*, P.O. Box 800, Mount Morris, IL 61054.

Editorial and Advertising Offices: 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103. Editorial Phone: (815) 964-5054. Advertising Phone: (815) 964-5811. Subscription Department: P.O. Box 800, Mount Morris, IL 61054.

U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, OH 44870.

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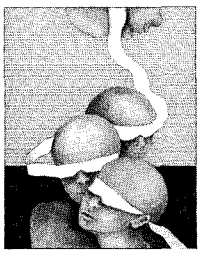

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On the Cover

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Fresh from his masterful *coup de sabotage* in *Amerika*, Kris Kristofferson betook himself to the USSR, to be berated by comrade Gennadi I. Gerasimov for his anti-Sovietism. Either Gerasimov had not seen the series in his closed-circuit sessions, or he was wily even by Soviet standards. In any case, Kristofferson defended the production as an inside job, to gain credibility with the American public. Previously, Kristofferson told the U.S. *TV Guide* that someone had to do the show, so why not the good guys? Whether comrade Gerasimov belongs to this group, which includes Yoko Ono, Claudia Cardinale, Marcello Mastroianni, Armand Hammer, Gore Vidal, *et al.* is uncertain. What is certain is that the imbecilic *Amerika* prompted Tom Wicker, Flora Lewis, *et al.* to come swinging against conservative "hardliners." As Anthony Lewis sniveled, "Why do we have this hysterical strain in us about Communism?"

Maybe Dr. Anatoly Koryagin, recently released by Gorbachev in his campaign against unjust political imprisonment, could enlighten Mr. Lewis. The Soviet opinion on free speech was pronounced by the camp commandant who told Koryagin, "You have caused so much harm to the Soviet Government that it would have been better if you had gone and shot 10 people." Indeed, in the USSR and its allies, the crime of exposure is the only one existing, unless committed by the head of state himself, as a "tactical" move. (Among other Soviet "tactical" moves it is good to recall Lenin's NEP, or Stalin's attempt to woo the Orthodox during the last World War.) For those unacquainted with Soviet terminology of "tactical concessions" to gain "strategic goals," Gorbachev's *glasnost* may indeed seem almost miraculous.

But, as "poet" Yevgeny Yevtushenko demonstrated in his two-page article on Feb. 9 in the *Times*, the only thing miraculous may be the gullibility of peacemongers in the West. In the great many-ringed circus of the Agitprop, comrade Yevtushenko is only one performer among others, but *glasnost* has afforded him an opportunity to tell us that his country is reaching "political maturity."

There is something awesome in seeing former Administration officials such as David Aaron coming back from the media ball set up in Moscow and ridiculing the whole Soviet initiative, in the *New York Times* of all places. What was it that prevented Mr. Aaron from thinking clearly when he was Jimmy Carter's Deputy National Security Adviser? To those who, like a Harvard Nobel Peace Prize winner, say, "When I think of peace, I think of Gorbachev," or, like Graham Greene, see Roman Catholicism as allied with Communism, one can only offer a smile. But, what is one to offer the Ark Communications Institute of Lafayette, California, which has placed a 1/4-page ad in *NYT* stating that "A housewife from Texas wins the trust of Soviet women. A string quartet from New York meets Soviet musicians. . . . American and Soviet young people climb a mountain together . . . "?

There are photographs, for those who care to recall, of G.I.'s posing with Soviet soldiers on the Elbe in 1945, and the Texas housewife touring USSR may have met some women who were *not* KGB operatives, yet Ark Communications' call for citizen diplomacy, if not *Citizen Summitry*, is a dangerous exercise in wishful thinking. Maybe, after all, Afghans don't matter—much less Ethiopians, Cubans, and Nicaraguans—but we might recall that in some Slavic languages, *glasnost* means "loudness," or "braggadocio." Among Gorbachev's many talents, besides those of a PR man, one shouldn't discount those of a linguist. If we can believe Yevtushenko and his many American friends who like to visit the USSR, Americans and Russians are kith and kin. Anyone who thinks otherwise is "differently mentally abled" and deserves to be locked away in an institution (preferably *not* the Ark Communications).

Letting out Iosif Begun, and at the same time keeping Vaclav Havel, Petr Uhl, Jiri Dienstbier, and others under threat of imprisonment, banishment, subtle or not-so-subtle harassment, should mean something, even to those in the West to whom their own lives and well-being constitute the universe. As the Soviets like to put it, "*eta nyet sluchayna*" ("it is by no accident"), and if *Amerika* or the Discovery Channel's 60 proposed hours of live TV from USSR weekly or Deputy Secretary of State John C. Whitehead's trips to Eastern Europe don't tip the balance, something else will, eventually.

Amerika, Amerika . . . "Sometimes it seems like nothing ever happens here," whined Cindy Pickett to Robert Urich on the first episode of the ABC miniseries. The writers were obviously trying to tell us something. If the United States can't come up with better television than this, it deserves to be taken over by the Soviets.

Conservatives are made of strong stuff, though, and many pretended to like *Amerika*. On the show's last night we ran into a Washington columnist who explained that, sure, the series left a lot to be desired, but it raised the unthinkable question. By that analysis, *Reds* was a conservative film. Plot and character are the center of all dramatic art, and since *Amerika* is entirely without plot, let's look at the characters. The hero, played by Kris Kristofferson, is a turncoat politician from the Plains. Why did a Nebraskan

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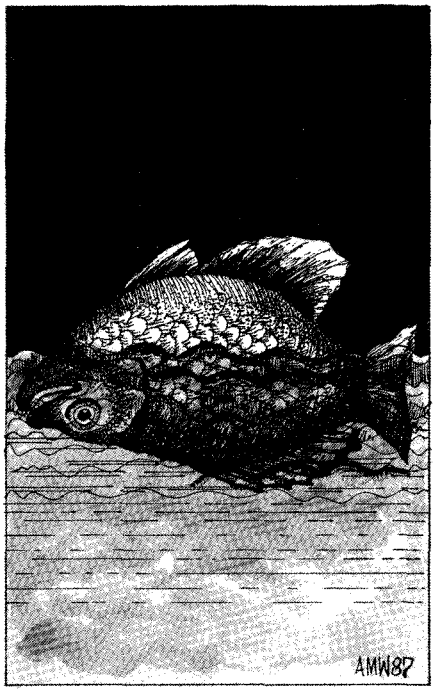
represent a Massachusetts district? The repeated references to John Kennedy ought to answer that. As for character, after watching 14 hours of Kris Kristofferson's impression of Buster Keaton, some viewers might have thought the show was really *Night of the Living Dead*.

The most engaging characters are a KGB colonel and a Russian general, both of whom express great angst for the poor Americans who don't actually suffer much more than they did under Jimmy Carter. The general goes so far as to shoot himself after performing a public service (the much-heralded massacre of the Congress—the traitors who turned the country over in the first place). As our Russian comrades would say, it is no accident that Sam Neill, the KGB colonel, puts in the only creditable performance. Who are the bad guys? Germans and Americans —who else?

Amerika is, in fact, a very left-wing production. Accepting the premise that the USSR, which can't even hold Afghanistan, could take over West Virginia, much less the U.S., the producers have done everything possible to exonerate our noble adversaries. There are vague references to labor camps and a Gulag, but the leader of the opposition is set free, and even after he emerges as a popular hero, Sam Neill prevents his American colleagues from killing him. The whole thing might have been scripted by *The Nation*. You see, there are many nice Russians, especially soldiers and KGB officers, and if we don't play ball with them, the mean guys in the Kremlin will get nasty. If I were in the KGB, I would be suing ABC for defamation of character.

Compared with other books on the same subject, *Amerika* is a whitewash of the Soviet Union and its intentions. *What to Do When the Russians Come*, for example, is a sometimes humorous, well-researched prediction that specifies extermination of liberals and socialists among the first acts of the occupying force. More interesting, perhaps, is a comparison with Pauline Winslow's *I, Martha Adams*, first published in Britain in 1982 and in the U.S. in 1984. There are enough similarities to suggest that ABC was as much inspired by Winslow as by Ben Stein's scenario outline, although Stein would be the first to take whatever credit there is. (In fact, the network contacted Winslow about the book.) In *I, Martha Adams*, the Soviets take over America with the assistance of the UN. There are other resemblances too numerous to mention (e.g., the role of the media in alerting the masses), but the differences are striking. Winslow's novel has patriotic Americans battling oppressive Russians; softness and meekness are shown as debilitating; Communism is inherently evil, and finally Winslow's novel is entertaining, unlike *Amerika*, which sets out to prove that anti-Communism is dull.



Some years back there was a made-for-TV movie (and series) which did address the subject of Soviet occupation. In V, red-uniformed "visitors" from outer space arrive offering humanitarian aid, which includes a cure for cancer. Accidentally, some Americans discover that under their plastic human faces, the visitors are reptiles who feed on human flesh and are planning to use the earth as a giant food processing plant. Among the resistance leaders is a militant thug from the CIA who cold-bloodedly kills the visitors wherever he finds them. Reproached by his colleagues, he (played wonderfully by Michael Ironside) explains, "I may bring down the neighborhood, but at least I don't eat it." Now, that's anti-Soviet television. (TF)

The divorce rate and the Federal deficit, both manageably small just 30 years ago, now seem locked in a feverish race upward. It is hard to say which is the gloomier statistic: a 50 percent failure rate among American marriages or a $2 trillion debt for the Federal government. No one seems to know just what to do about the divorce rate, but a few congressmen are cautiously suggesting that the Federal deficit might be reduced through raising taxes. So why not enact a national divorce tax?

After all, in not taxing divorce, lawmakers are passing up a lot of available tax money. In 1986 alone there were well over one million divorces in the United States. Why, in San Diego one judge has now taken to divorcing couples by the roomful! And since divorcing couples already have their wallets (and purses) open to pay the lawyers, why shouldn't the tax man step right up for a share of household assets?

Some might object to a divorce tax on the grounds that people who couldn't afford to pay the tax would be unfairly locked in bad marriages. But this objection could easily be overcome by making the divorce tax steeply progressive, like the *old* Federal income tax. Poor separating couples would pay almost nothing in divorce tax, while rich couples would pay through the nose.

Under the proposed tax, real deficit reduction would finally be achieved by at least some lawmakers—those who, while in Washington, split with their spouses to marry their worshipful secretaries. By making the proposed tax retroactive for politicians, we could at last get bipartisan deficit reduction from Teddy Kennedy and Bob Dole.

The proposed tax would also give us a new reason to be grateful for Hollywood. Unless actors and actresses changed their behavior—an unlikely possibility—their huge box-office incomes would quickly be diverted into our depleted national treasury. Elizabeth Taylor alone could have wiped out three or four weeks of Federal deficits! People like Sylvester Stallone and Farrah Fawcett may fail as public models of marital stability, but we could then hold them up as exemplary patriots, cutting the national deficit for the next generation. And with the help of *National Enquirer*, Federal tax

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agents would always know when and where to show up.

Some may still contend that divorce should remain a free private choice, unencumbered by tax restraints. But almost all of the arguments now used to justify heavy taxes on other bad habits—like liquor, tobacco, and studded snow tires—could with even greater justice be applied to divorce tax. Smoking may cause cancer, but divorce produces juvenile delinquents. Liquor gives us drunk drivers and alcoholism; divorce fosters depression and psychosis.

According to John McDermott, professor of psychiatry at the University of Hawaii, "divorce is now the single largest cause of childhood depression." Vance Packard also reports that children in one-parent homes are much more likely to fail in school, to be sexually promiscuous, and to turn to crime. Little children especially suffer in divorce, typically blaming themselves for their parents' separation. Stanford sociologist Lenore Weitzman blames divorce for pushing millions of women and children into poverty and near-poverty during the 1970's. Besides, one major study found that two years after the event, almost two-thirds of those who have been divorced think that their divorce was a mistake.

A divorce tax could also be justified by the public expenses that divorce creates. Richard Neely, West Virginia Supreme Court Justice, pointed out recently in *The New Republic* that "the burden of divorce-related poverty falls on society as a whole. Welfare payments, subsidized housing, public sector make-work jobs, and salaries for lawyers who collect support for women and children are but a few of the mounting costs we pay for other people's divorces."

Just possibly, a divorce tax would affect the divorce rate itself. In that case, we'd have to find some other way of reversing the dizzying deficit spiral. And, too, thousands of lawyers, psychiatrists, and juvenile probation officers would then have to find some other line of work. Maybe they could sell U.S. Savings Bonds. (BC)

Rockford, Illinois, is on most maps, but even Illinois residents sometimes have a hard time locating it. "Somewhere near Springfield?" Dame Rebecca West once tried to convey the remoteness and obscurity of a town in the Balkans by comparing it with Rockford. Until recently, the remoteness and obscurity of our location provided a cover for our activities. No longer. Early in March, a National Weather Service "test" bulletin announced that Illinois' second largest city had been destroyed by a tornado. When the bulletin was read over the air by several Chicago radio stations, the only reaction was fear that the storm might hit Chicago.

Taking out a whole city just to destroy a magazine seems like a desperate measure, but next time around the bureaucrats had better make sure their tornado's loaded.

REVISIONS

Off the Rack

"Poetry is painting that can talk," or so Simonides thought, but it is dangerous to push the analogy between fiction and graphic art.

While Vermeer found beauty in tiles, tables, and fruit plates, Homer had to recite the deeds of men to keep our interest for the past two and a half thousand years. Words, unlike images, talk of eternal news, and when writers of fiction in verse or prose neglect this task, their only success will consist of literary awards. Both *The Evening News* by Tony Ardizzone (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press; $13.95) and *The Boys of Bensonhurst* by Salvatore La Puma (Athens: University of Georgia Press; $13.95) have won the Flannery O'Connor Prize. For *Floral Street* by Simon Burt (London: Faber and Faber; $9.95), honors are probably just a matter of time.

In fact, except for a few idiosyncracies (Burt has a predilection for the macabre, Ardizzone for the mawkish, La Puma for the erotic), all the short fictions in these three books could have been ground in the same mill, as predictably downbeat as anything on the evening news.

Dostoevsky was among the first to

bank on his youthful discovery that life is not what it's cracked up to be, and it seems that modern fiction is destined to be cursed with this fascination for a long time. Of the three, Simon Burt is the best storyteller (neither Ardizzone nor La Puma being unaccomplished), but childhood, college, and nightbatting are poor substitutes for experience, for all their picturesque qualities. Instead of prancing pastoralism of 17th-century French painting, our mannerism drips with gore, pus, and bile. Which is better depends on taste, though mannerism and kitsch have little to distinguish between them, although kitsch is sweeter.

If Homer was blind, it is safe to suppose he had earned it, whereas most of our contemporaries have assumed their blindness like sunglasses in a nightclub. Wordmongering has ever been a holy craft, leased to those who had something to say. Whether the nonchalance of a live-sex performer, obliged to copulate with his own son on stage (*Floral Street*), or the ruminations of a college professor worried about nuclear Armageddon (*The Evening News*) or a young Sicilian's decision to become a priest after killing in self-defense (*The Boys of Bensonhurst*) speak to anyone but their authors is open to serious question.

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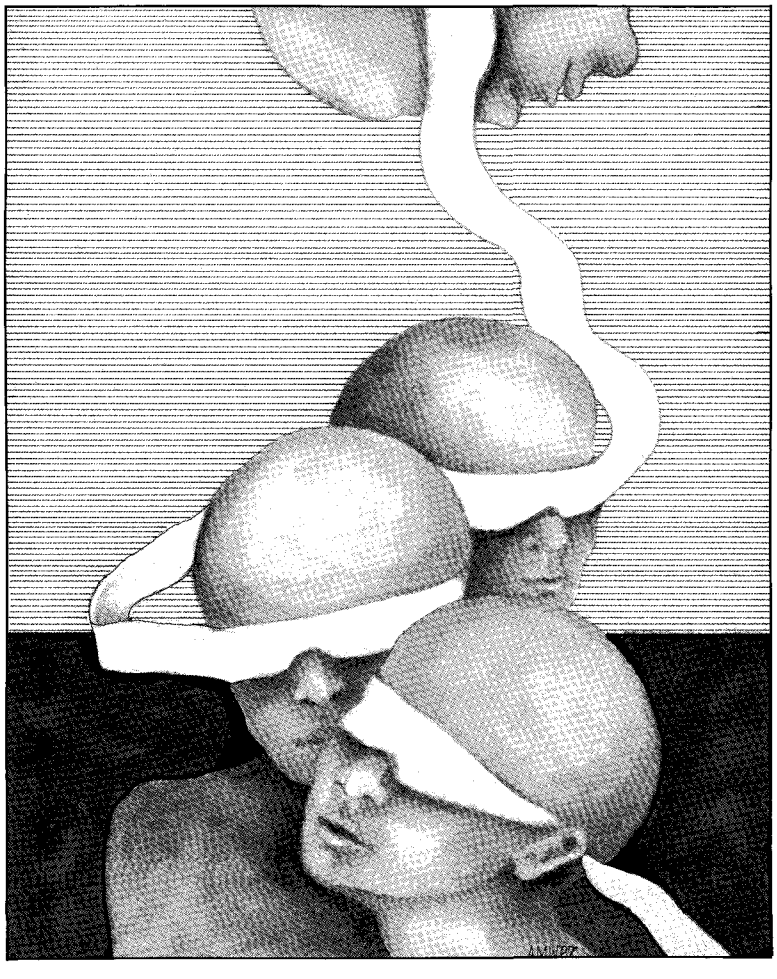
THRICE-TOLD TALES *by Thomas Fleming*

Politics and tale-telling are virtually inseparable activities. Great political events—wars, rebellions, social crusades—do not exert their full measure of influence until they are whittled into legends. More than one British statesman has derived his understanding of the Wars of the Roses from Shakespeare's *Histories*, and in the United States the stories of Washington at Valley Forge, Lincoln the man of sorrows, and Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan Hill have been told and retold, written down, footnoted, played upon the stage, and filmed so often that we are scarcely aware of them. Our heroes are a part of our experience and define, more than anything else, the aspirations of the American character.



There is, however, another side to this union of politics and myth: powerful plays, novels, and (perhaps) films have a way of becoming political matters. *Richard II* put Shakespeare in danger, when the Earl of Essex had it performed on the eve of his rebellion. (Elizabeth was understandably uncomfortable with the depiction of usurpation and regicide.) Addison's *Cato* was cheered not only by the Whigs, for whom it was written, but also by the Tories who wished to appropriate the message and convert resistance to royal authority into a defense of legitimate government.

But it is not only overtly political works which stir up such controversy. *Huckleberry Finn* remains a subject of dispute, both for its portrayal of ante-bellum Southern life and for its use of the word n----r. A bowdlerized version is said to be in the works. The more modern tale of boyhood, *A Catcher in the Rye*, has also been the target of the censors who did not like the explicitness of its language or the implications of adolescent rebellion. On the other side of the political spectrum, there is some evidence that liberal critics are increasingly disenchanted with Hemingway and Fitzgerald, largely because of their unpleasant Jewish characters (remember Robert Cohn's big nose? or Gatsby's sinister partner, Meyer Wolfsheim?).

What is there about the novel—or any fiction, for that matter—to excite such passion? Words are, after all, a weak and slovenly building material. The tritest clichés in a rhetorical handbook—almost all of them—are variations on the theme of "words cannot express . . . " or "the world will little note what we say here . . . " Plato banished poets for their deceits, and his most wayward disciple, the classical philologist Friedrich Nietzsche, condemned all poets as liars. There is little cause for wondering at their impatience. So much of literary art, the novel, the tale, the history, consists of telling palpable lies, of pulling not the wool, but the polyester over the reader's eyes. No matter what he may have felt in his youth, a grown man tires of most novels. So few of them encapsule the feeblest glimmer of human experience. Ultimately, the fate of a Robert Jordan or an Anna Karenina can scarcely be said to engage the interest of a reflective person. In earlier times, novelists themselves were sensible of their degraded position in the realm of letters. Jane Austen, one of the best of the lot, more than once puts a defense of novel-reading into a character's mouth. Even so, it is remarkable that a writer should gain a reputation, grow rich on a pack of lies, no matter how artfully arranged.

Few historians these days lay any claim to art. Now, they

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are all scientists. The main trouble with historical writing is that the reader gradually comes to realize that the historian expects to be taken seriously as a purveyor of truth rather than as a philosopher or (what is more common) a propagandist. Serious historians *always* have an ax to grind, and the best of them finish the edge with the slickest whetstones. Thucydides, Tacitus, Hume, Macaulay have little in common with moderns like Christopher Hill, Eugene Genovese, or Hans Georg Gadamer except this one thing: They know that tales of time past serve primarily to shape our behavior in the present. Young people, quite properly, accept their creations at face value. An older man believes little, trusts less.

If the principal vanity of historians is to demand credulity, the trouble with novelists is that they ask so little of us. The exercise of reading most fiction requires little more than the belief that human beings are motivated almost exclusively by erotic passion. The same sex-obsession that mars so much of Shakespeare (as opposed to Sophocles, for example) is central to the plots of all but the best novels. How strange that several of the earliest narrative prose fictions in English made so little of sex. It is hard to remember that Christian even has a wife, and modern critics are so puzzled by *Robinson Crusoe* (or *Huckleberry Finn*, for that matter) that they are compelled to drag these works through the mire of "suppressed homosexuality."

Walter Scott, who knew that his readers expected the love-interest to dominate the story, was impatient with plots. In his view, they were nothing more than a peg on which to hang his characters. However, in his best work (in verse as well as prose) Scott was concerned with more than the exploration of character or even moral drama. For him, there was a "matter of Scotland" in the tales and legends of border struggles, highland incursions, and above all in the great uprisings of national self-assertion under Robert Bruce and in The '45. In *Waverly* we are less concerned with the fate of the foolish young hero than we are with Scotland's last great national struggle. In America, a similar effort was made by less-talented writers like the infinitely tedious Cooper and the wooden but far more powerful Gilmore Simms.

There are many kinds of prose fiction, and it would be a vain effort to say one kind is necessarily better than another. However, what is common to the best work of Scott, Hardy, Thackeray (especially *Henry Esmond*) is a kind of seriousness we do not associate, ordinarily, even with the best "philosophical" novels. Aristotle considered poetry (by which he meant the epic and drama) more philosophical than history, because it dealt with the probable, the natural; but even in that comparison he revealed a typically Greek outlook. For the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and all the tragedies on epic themes constituted a kind of more philosophical history in which generation after generation of Greek storytellers and writers reconsidered and refashioned the stories of their race. When Aeschylus put the story of Agamemnon's murder (and the revenge that followed) on the stage, he was working in the shadow of the *Odyssey* and a narrative lyric poem of Stesichorus. When Sophocles and Euripides each had their go at the same tale, it was not because they were hampered by any lack of imagination or even because a familiar story allowed them to concentrate on character, style, and music.

We never grow tired of hearing the stories that really matter to us. In each retelling, they can be held up to a different light. Even the usual mediocre sermon on the prodigal son may strike the right chord with a churchgoer on a drowsy Sunday morning, because the tale is material to his life as a Christian. Imagine the interest if he or his were actors in the piece. What Walter Scott and Hardy share with Homer and Aeschylus is precisely this quality of telling "tales of a grandfather" to an interested family circle.

In America this sort of historical piety is associated primarily with Southern writers, although the current crop of Southern novelists is generally careful to steer clear of its Faulknerian inheritance. Walker Percy and Lee Smith write about the South, but they do not labor under the burden of history. There are, however, several prominent exceptions. Peter Taylor's best work often has the quality of an extended genealogical research, a feature he shares with a younger and quite different writer, Fred Chappell. Somewhere in between stands the enigmatic George Garrett, who has divided his time between stories set in the fairly recent South and two masterfully researched novels set in Elizabethan England. *Death of a Fox* and *The Succession* are, in my view, the best historical novels since *Henry Esmond*, and I would hazard a guess that for Mr. Garrett the subjects (Walter Raleigh, James VI & I, *et al.*) were not chosen arbitrarily as representatives of some exotic place and time. If Americans have an experience beyond the recent events of colonization and revolution, then it is the history of Britain that makes all of us (Swedes, Poles, Italians, as well as Scots) an ancient people instead of children without memory.

It is stories that bind us together as a nation: American stories, British stories, Roman history, and even Greek myths. As Donald Horowitz makes plain in his recent book *Ethnic Conflict*, neighbors who cherish conflicting stories about the past cannot live in harmony. Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia, Greeks and Turks on Cyprus, Yankees and Southerners have quite different versions of their nation's histories. If they live together long enough, perhaps the dueling legends will be subsumed into a larger story. The German Kings of Great Britain may look silly dressed up in kilts, but their slender claims to legitimacy and Scots descent are a graceful bow to the people of Scotland.

Other countries try a more direct approach. In Yugoslavia the authorities made a strenuous effort to erase the national histories of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and it is surely part of Mr. Djilas' offensiveness to the regime that *all* his best work is written in a celebration of Montenegro. If one can judge from textbooks and political pronouncements, the United States is more likely to follow the example of Yugoslavia than Great Britain. For some time now, textbooks have been carefully concocted to portray a secular and pluralist America owing as much to the Ghost Dance as to Christianity. Despite the palpable fact that our language, social institutions, and literature are mainly an extension of Britain (and, in general, Northern Europe), holidays and history books are strenuous in promoting a picture of a polyglot "nation of immigrants." The most recent phase of this nationalist ideology flies under the

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THE PACT

by J.C. Hall

Children and lovers
Act so safe in sleep.
How can they trust us so?
What is the pact we keep?

Astonishing that a light's
Shaft or an elbow's knock
Scarcely disturbs them. They lapse
Back to themselves. The shock

Of such insouciance
Is not theirs but ours—
That nature should chance all night
Her brief gifts, like flowers.

When in the doorway's streak
Our shadow falls on them
They murmur *it's you* perhaps
And stretch an arm

But do not swim up to meet
Our watchful eyes.
The sleeping are careless of
Life's frailties.

Nightlong the city prowls,
The victim receives the knife,
The unfaithful cars cruise home,
The river lets down its grief.

But these who do not know
How lightly they draw breath
Or might wake up alone
Corroborate those they're with.

How can they trust us so?
What is the pact we keep?
Lovers and children
Act so safe in sleep.

---

banner of "cultural conservatism" by which is meant a new civil religion of secularized holidays and the celebration of President Lincoln and Dr. King. A fairly large number of Americans who might have reservations about a political leader with certain dubious political connections and a personal life that many regard as scandalous, will all be consigned to the very inmost circle of hell where Satan feeds upon parricides and traitors. (I wouldn't be in Senator Helms's shoes for anything.) We probably had to have some sort of formal recognition that black Americans had fought their way into the political mainstream, but a Black Americans Day or—better—a Roy Wilkins Day would have served the purpose.

If cultural conservatism were a gambit likely to succeed, most of us would swallow our pride and say, "Go ahead." Most Southerners are willing to accept the canonization of Lincoln, and they, along with the rest of Middle America, might, in time, learn to accept Dr. King. But for Lincoln, the warming-up process took about three generations (and there are still, I understand, a few holdouts in Texas). Candidates for sainthood usually struggle (*post mortem*) for at least two generations and have to face the investigation of a hard-nosed devil's advocate. In 1964 we were all sure of John Kennedy's status as "King and Martyr." We even aped the Soviet practice of renaming places, but now we are back to Cape Canaveral, and the golden legend of the Kennedys is a coinage as debased and despised as the Susan B. Anthony dollar. In a free country, the government only recognizes heroes; it does not create them. The insistence on pushing Dr. King, while a majority of Americans retain some memory of his, let us say, controversial career, is bound to backfire.

Many Americans, especially in the urban North, have a counterstory to tell about the 1960's, of power-crazed judges who seized control of school systems, of riots that burned down half of downtown Detroit, of a whole generation sacrificed to the vanity of preachers and politicians engaged in yet another crusade for moral uplift.

Which version of events will prevail is hard to predict. Ten years ago, journalists and historians were certain that Richard Nixon was the Antichrist of American history. Now, they are not so sure. The proverbial horse led to water cannot always be made to drink.

Other nations have suffered far worse conflicts and, if left alone, managed to heal their wounds. The emperor Augustus is said to have praised Cicero (whose death sentence he had approved) to a young relative caught with an incriminating book. For some men, the end of hostilities is enough to reconcile them to an enemy. The Puritan Andrew Marvell composed the most moving lines ever written on the martyrdom of Charles I, and Charles Francis Adams spoke a eulogy at the funeral of Robert E. Lee. For most Romans, however, I suspect it took a national epic, the *Aeneid* to renew their sense of national purpose. On a lower level, Carl Sandburg's Lincoln hagiography and *Gone With the Wind* performed the same function for us.

American filmmakers are up to something similar with all the Vietnam films that run the gamut from *Rambo II* to *Platoon*. The civil rights movement and the rest of "the 60's thing" has yet to be translated successfully into an important film, much less an enduring novel, much less an epic poem. If someone from the current generation of novelists were to get off his comfortable professorial chair and take a serious look at the great civil struggle of 20 years ago, he might single-handedly restore the fortunes of the novel, although such an effort may take another 40 or 50 years. Scott's *Waverly* has the suggestive subtitle *Sixty Years Since* and Margaret Mitchell completed her vulgar epic about 70 years after the end of the Civil War.

Time heals all things. The ground upon which battles have raged is gradually cleansed as the rain leaches out defoliants and petroleum, as metal shells rust into the soil, and the bleached bones and rotted flesh yield a rich black humus. There is no good way to hasten the process.

—*Thomas Fleming*

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SOME THOUGHTS ON BEING A WRITER

by V.S. Naipaul

The following is the text of Mr. Naipaul's speech at the 1986 Ingersoll Prizes Awards Banquet.

I do not really know how I became a writer. I can give certain dates and certain facts about my career. But the process itself remains mysterious. It is mysterious, for instance, that the ambition should have come first—the wish to be a writer, to have that distinction, that fame—and that this ambition should have come long before I could think of anything to write about.

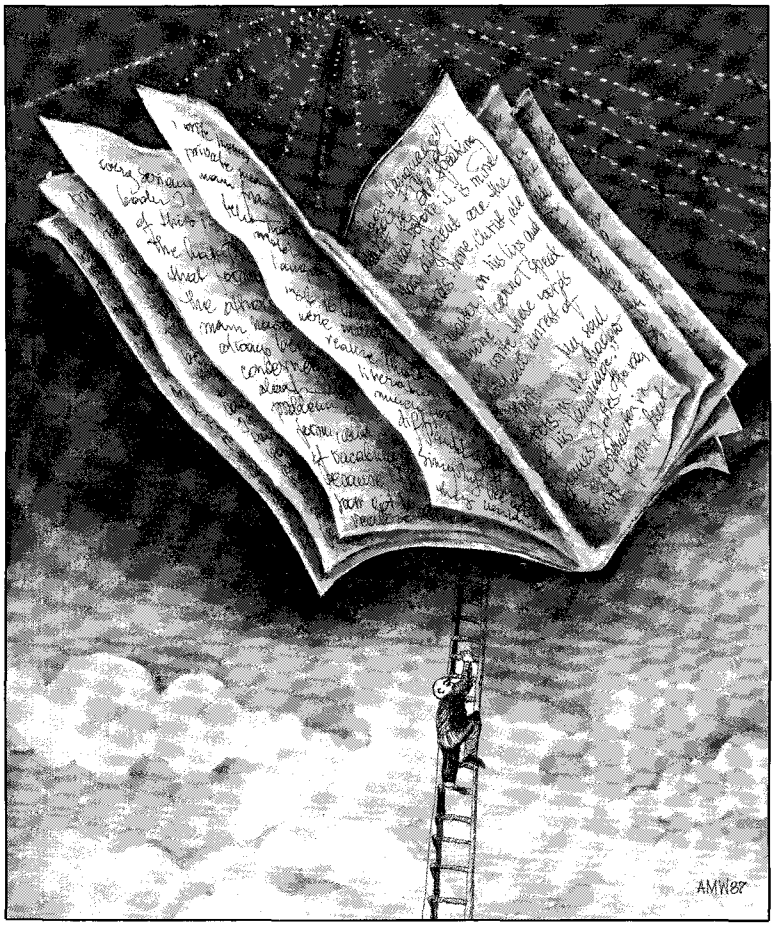
I remember, in my first term at Oxford in 1950, going for long walks—I remember the roads, the autumn leaves, the cars and trucks going by, whipping the leaves up—and wondering what I was going to write about. I had worked hard for the scholarship to go to Oxford, to be a writer. But now that I was in Oxford, I didn't know what to write about. And really, I suppose, unless I had been driven by great necessity, something even like panic, I might never have written. The idea of laying aside the ambition was very restful and tempting—the way sleep was said to be tempting to Napoleon's soldiers on the retreat from Moscow.

I felt it as artificial, that sitting down to write a book. And that is a feeling that is with me still, all these years later, at the start of a book—I am speaking of an imaginative work. There is no precise theme or story that is with me. Many things are with me; I write the artificial, self-conscious beginnings of many books; until finally some true impulse —the one I have been working towards—possesses me, and I sail away on my year's labor. And that is mysterious still—that out of artifice one should touch and stir up what is deepest is one's soul, one's heart, one's memory.

All literary forms are artificial, and they are constantly changing, to match the new tone and mood of the culture. At one time, for instance, a person of serious literary inclination might have thought of writing for the theater; would have had somehow to do what I cannot do—arrange his material into scenes and acts; would not have written for the printed page, but would have written "parts" to tempt actors; and—as someone who has written plays has told me—would have visualized himself (to facilitate the play-writing process) as sitting in a seat in the stalls.

At another period, in an age without radio or records, an age dominated by print, someone wishing to write would have had to shape a narrative that could have been serialized over many months, or fill three volumes. Before that, the writer might have attempted narratives in verse or verse drama, rhymed or unrhymed; or verse epics.

All those forms, artificial as they seem to us today, would have appeared as natural and as right to their practitioners as the standard novel does today. Artificial though that novel form is, with its simplifications and distortions, its artificial scenes, and its idea of experience as a crisis that has to be



V.S. Naipaul received the T.S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing on November 21, 1986.

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resolved before life resumes its even course. I am describing, very roughly, the feeling of artificiality which was with me at the very beginning, when I was trying to write and wondering what part of my experience could be made to fit the form—wondering, in fact, in the most insidious way, how I could adapt or falsify my experience to make it fit the grand form.

Literary forms are necessary: Experience has to be transmitted in some agreed or readily comprehensible way. But certain forms, like fashions in dress, can at times become extreme. And then these forms, far from crystallizing or sharpening experience, can falsify or be felt as a burden. The Trollope who is setting up a situation—the Trollope who is a social observer, with an immense knowledge both of society and the world of work, a knowledge far greater than that of Dickens—is enchanting. But I have trouble with the Trollope who, having set up a situation, settles down to unwinding his narrative—the social or philosophical gist of which I might have received in his opening pages. I feel the same with Thackeray: I can feel how the need for narrative and plot sat on his shoulders like a burden.

Our ideas of literary pleasures and narratives have in fact changed in the last 100 years or so. All the writing of the past century and the cinema and television have made us quicker. And the 19th-century English writers who now give me the most "novelistic" pleasure—provide windows into human lives, encouraging reflection—are writers who in their own time would not have been thought of as novelists at all.

I am thinking of writers like Richard Jefferies, whose essays about farming people carry so much knowledge and experience that they often contain whole lives. Or William Hazlitt. Or Charles Lamb, concrete and tough and melancholy, not the gentle, wishy-washy essayist of legend. Or William Cobbett, the journalist and pamphleteer, dashing about the countryside, and in his breakneck prose, and through his wild prejudices, giving the clearest pictures of the roads and the fields and the people and the inns and the food. All of these writers would have had their gifts diluted or corrupted by the novel form as it existed in their time. All of them, novelistic as they are in the pleasures they offer, found their own forms.

Every serious writer has to be original; he cannot be content to do or to offer a version of what has been done before. And every serious writer as a result becomes aware of this question of form; because he knows that however much he might have been educated and stimulated by the writers he has read or reads, the forms matched the experience of those writers and do not strictly suit his own.

The late Philip Larkin—original and very grand, especially in his later work—thought that form and content were indivisible. He worked slowly, he said. "You're finding out what to say as well as how to say it, and that takes time." It sounds simple; but it states a difficult thing. Literature is not like music; it isn't for the young; there are no prodigies in writing. The knowledge or experience a writer seeks to transmit is social or sentimental; it takes time, it can take much of a man's life, to process that experience to understand what he has been through; and it takes great care and tact, then, for the nature of the experience not to be lost, not to be diluted by the wrong forms. The other man's forms served the other man's thoughts.

I have always been concerned about this problem of form, and even of vocabulary, because I fairly soon got to realize that between the literature I knew and read, the literature that seeded my own ambition, between that and my background, there was a division, a dissonance. And it was quickly made clear to me that there was no question simply of mimicking the forms.

In one of his early books, James Joyce wrote of the difficulty for him—or his hero—of the English language. "That language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master*, on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. . . . My soul frets in the shadow of his language."

James Joyce was an experimenter in pure form—form divorced from content. And the James Joyce point about language is not the one I am making. I never felt that problem with the English language—language as language. The point that worried me was one of vocabulary, of the differing meanings or associations of words. *Garden*, *house*, *plantation*, *gardener*, *estate*: These words mean one thing in England and mean something quite different to the man from Trinidad, an agricultural colony, a colony settled for the purpose of plantation agriculture. How, then, could I write honestly or fairly if the very words I used, with private meanings for me, were yet for the reader outside shot through with the associations of the older literature? I felt that truly to render what I saw, I had to define myself as a writer or narrator; I had to reinterpret things. I have tried to do this in different ways throughout my career. And after two years' work, I have just finished a book in which at last, as I think, I have managed to integrate this business of reinterpreting with my narrative.

My aim was truth, truth to a particular experience, containing a definition of the writing self. Yet I was aware at the end of that book that the creative process remained as mysterious as ever.

The French critic Sainte-Beuve thought that the personal details of a writer's life made clear many things about the writer. This method of Sainte-Beuve's was bitterly assailed by Proust in a strange book—a strange and original and beautiful form, part autobiography, part literary criticism, part fiction—called *Against Sainte-Beuve*, where the criticism of the critic and his method, releasing the writer's love of letters, also releases the autobiographical and fictive elements of the work.

"This method," Proust writes—and he is talking about the method of Sainte-Beuve—"ignores what a very slight degree of self-acquaintance teaches us, that a book is the product of a different *self* from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices." And a little later on, Proust elucidates: "The implication [is] that there is something more superficial and empty in a writer's authorship, something deeper and more contemplative in his private life. . . . In fact, it is the secretion of one's innermost life, written in solitude and for oneself alone, that one gives to the public. What one bestows on private life—in conversation, however refined it may be—is the product of a quite superficial self, not of the innermost self which one can

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only recover by putting aside the world and the self that frequents the world."

And it is curious—yet not really surprising—that almost the same thought about the writer's writing self should have been expressed by a quite different writer, Somerset Maugham. In his fictional portrait of Thomas Hardy in *Cakes and Ale*, Maugham, by a wonderful stroke (which earned him much abuse), showed the tragic novelist of Wessex to be in his private life extraordinarily ordinary, and for that reason mysterious. "I had an impression"—this is Maugham's summing up—"that the real man, to his death unknown and lonely, was a wraith that went a silent way unseen between the writer of his books and the man who led his life, and smiled with an ironical detachment at the two puppets."

RESCUING STORY FROM HISTORY

by Frederick Turner

By the end of the 18th century, the novel had already begun to replace the rich variety of narrative genres that preceded it. This is a familiar theme in the history of the arts in the modern period. One particular artistic form comes to be preferred for its freedom; it crowds out the other forms, which are disdained for their traditional limitations; finally the artist is less free than she was at the beginning, having only one genre for her thoughts rather than many. (The same thing has happened with the lyric poem.)

The great novelists of the 19th century well understood the subtle handicaps of that apparently freest of forms. In his foreword to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky berates his readers in advance for their anticipated preference for the psychologically "interesting" figures of Ivan and Dmitri, and insists that it is Alyosha, the holy brother, who is the true hero. Tolstoy implicitly does the same thing in *Anna Karenina*, giving us a Levin whose motivations are not entirely novelistic, as a counterweight to his Anna and Vronsky, who are, as it were, virtuoso compositions of novelistic psychology. In *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch* we can, I think, see George Eliot struggling in the same way to release her heroines from the sociopsychological determinism that the novel form itself subtly imposes. In *Madame Bovary* we see the same theme but with a different strategy for dealing with it. Emma's psychic straitjacket is thematized as tragic, in almost the same way that in Greek tragedy the dramatic form itself, of which irony is an essential structural feature, plays the part of the divine fate that destroys the hero.

What is it that the great novelists were battling against? Essentially this: When the novel abandoned the constraints of the classical narrative genres—meter, allegorical significance, mythic structure, etc.—it had to replace them with another constraint which, because it was largely invisible, part of a body of unexamined assumptions, was the more tyrannous. That constraint is what we know as motivational verisimilitude, or consistency of character. It is made up of two elements: the sociological and the psychological. The price the novelist pays for freedom from the old constraints is to be forced to create characters who are psychic and/or social automata; the contract between writer and reader requires that the reader be flattered in his worldly theory of human motivation, his shrewd estimate of human predictability. Since probability is now the only constraint and thus the only expressive medium whose manipulation might constitute meaning, woe betide the novelist who creates a character that resists the currently favored fashion of psychological or social determination! Such a character is not only a sort of moral insult to a reader who considers herself bound by those laws and excuses her conduct by means of them, but is also an aesthetically discordant note in the

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harmony of the form itself.

If, for instance, the libidinal drive is popularly believed to be fundamental, then it is useless, indeed rather sinister, to resist it even if it requires breaking faith with other people. In fact it is heroic, as in the case of Connie and Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, to give that impulse absolute sway. The reader is sentimentally warmed by this compliment to his own incontinence; and conversely, offended by a character who denies it. Perhaps the ultimate such psychic automaton is the heroine of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. If on the other hand social forces are thought to govern motivation, the realism and verisimilitudes that keep open the channel between writer and reader will consist in characterizations that obey the laws of class and social history. Such is the socialist novel, though the naturalistic novel before it had a strong tendency in this direction also.

Perhaps it was in response to an unconscious sense of these constraints, as well as for the reasons already cited for the destructiveness of modern art, that the novelists progressively undermined all the foundations of their form itself, except for the one—motivational verisimilitude—that was causing the trouble. The original plot of the novel was a courtship leading to a marriage. With variations and elaborations, this single plot could serve as a capacious framework for whatever else the novelist wanted to do. As long as the moment of sexual union was delayed—and much of the novelist's art consisted of ingenious delays—the plot was alive and could carry freight.

This plot gradually came under attack. The marriages became more and more objectionable to the societies in which they took place; then came the novel of adultery, the novel of multiple adultery, the novel of sexual freedom, and the loss of that suspense which is so central a part of a story. A new plot had to be found, and it was. It consisted of the liberation of the protagonist from the society of his or her birth; a liberation at first fatal to the hero or heroine, but eventually, as this plot matured, beneficial. Gradually the liberated protagonist came to be identified with the author, and the novel lost most of its other characters and came to resemble autobiography. Now the novel was adopted by the academy and suspense was no longer required to keep its paid readers. So plot itself was abandoned in the New Novel and its ilk, to undergo a phantom resurrection in the postmodern novel as the quoted fiction of a fictional author. But the ball and chain of psychosocial verisimilitude remained through all these changes.

Another way of putting this is in terms of the tense of the novel: the past historic. When a novelist tries to escape by using the present tense, it feels like the historic present. The characters are fixed to an ineluctable past which they can never escape: They are temporal automata going through their psychic motions before the eyes of a godlike reader, whose secure place in the present preserves him like a god above the struggles of the protagonists and whose feelings perhaps include a trace of sadistic voyeurism.

The point becomes clear when we contrast the novel with different narrative forms. Consider the myth, whose timeless heroes and heroines are terrifyingly free to establish a language of action for us to emulate or avoid. Or the epic, which does the same but does it within history, showing us how to generate our own kind of time, for a whole society. Even the mere addition of poetic meter, by bringing into direct play other parts of the brain than the linguistic capacities of the left temporal lobe, can provide a playful spaciousness, an openness to mystery, an alternate structure to psychological probability that can release a story's protagonists and readers into a greater world.

Or take science fiction, which, since it rejects the psychosocial givens, turning them over to the technological imagination of its protagonists, is not much concerned with motivational verisimilitude; but which can make perfect sense as a story to an attuned reader, while, like myth, it takes up anew the great philosophical and scientific questions abandoned for so long by the mainstream novelists. Again, drama, which is genuinely always in the present tense, need not be tied down to psychosocial determinism; those wonderfully subtle and moving automata of Ibsen and Chekhov do feel to us in the past tense, but the allegorical figures of Brecht and Beckett do not in the same way, however dated the Marxist or existentialist ideas they represent. Shakespeare, who has his characters choose and perform their own masks—all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players—gives us all the pleasure of a novel while preserving the protean initiative of his characters. The detective novel occupies an interesting place in this classification, for the detective is indeed in the present tense, while all the suspects she analyzes are in the past. But the detective pays for this godlike power by a hermetic and hermeneutic detachment from the world; unable to take part in the actions of the automata, she can only, like the reader, come to understand them.

The postmodern solution to the problem of psychosocial automatism is no real solution; for in insisting on the fictional arbitrariness of his characters, the postmodern novelist simply turns himself into the god of the story universe, and his characters act out his own imputed psychic automatisms. John Fowles has sought a way out of the problem in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by providing multiple endings and in *Daniel Martin* by abandoning his own fictional narrator. But in doing this he has essentially borrowed from science fiction the device of

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles*:

Men Without Women

"Few men now are craftsmen, that is, few men are now Christian. No longer artists, we serve the autonomous machine. For a long time the machine as tool aided the craftsmen to make. A divine inheritance withers when the tool becomes the master and the Word is drowned in words."

—from "A Myth in a Garden"
by Andrew Lytle

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multiple time-lines, without borrowing science fiction's much more relaxed view of motivational verisimilitude. Even more brilliantly Nabokov, in *Ada*, invented a whole new world for his narrator-heroine and narrator-hero; like Doris Lessing and Anthony Burgess, among others, he found it necessary to go all the way over to science fiction, in order to set his characters free.

It may seem irresponsible to advocate the abandonment of motivational verisimilitude in fictional characterization, as it may be inferred I am doing here. But it does make sense. Paradoxically, real people surprise us all the time by their capacity to act "out of character," to disobey the currently fashionable laws of psychological and social motivation. People are nobler and more wicked than they ever are in novels. Sometimes they invent their own motivational schemes and live by them; even, as in the case of the great devisers of such schemes, Freud and Marx, impose them on millions of other people.

The only true verisimilitude for sane and healthy human beings is surprisingness; it is the mentally sick who are predictable, and their predictability constitutes their mental sickness. What makes a long marriage possible, so that its participants do not die of boredom with each other, is precisely our capacity to reinvent ourselves and each other, to play the storyteller with our lives and surprise our audience. It is the automatisms of our spouses that are intolerable; the very thing that makes a novelistic character believable is what makes a marriage impossible. No wonder that the easiest kind of novel to write is one about divorce! In this sense the realist psychological novel can only be about damaged people.

Not that complete people act randomly; rather, they are autonomous, they make up their rules through a process of reflection and artistic synthesis that makes perfect sense after it has come into existence and been explained, but which cannot be predicted beforehand by psychological or sociological laws. And the mechanisms of this freedom are to a large extent implicit in the classical artistic tools: in the literary field, poetic meter, dramatic role-playing, sacrificial and performative action, mythic archetypes, and narrative structure, among others.

Narrative calls into play a number of basic human capacities. Vladimir Lefebvre, the brilliant mathematical psychologist, has shown that we possess an inbuilt reflexive operator which enables us to regard ourselves and others as players upon an internal stage, and to imagine not only the points of view of those players but their point of view about each other's point of view. Out of this recursive feedback process comes our everyday ethical calculus and the gradients of possible action we express by the modal auxiliaries "ought" and "should." We do this very complex thing very easily, like seeing or speaking; it is wired in. Our panhuman preference for the golden section, which is the fundamental proportion generated by any feedback process, is related to this operator.

Again, narrative constructs a temporal sequence which in

There is a small Catholic college in the mountains of Southern California unlike anything in your experience.

Its students don't read textbooks or take notes on lectures. They delight in vigorous and rational arguments with each other and with their teachers.

Many of the teachers you know by name. Most of them are dead. Newman, Einstein, Dante, Kant, Aristotle, Homer, and the College patron, St. Thomas Aquinas, are among the permanent faculty.

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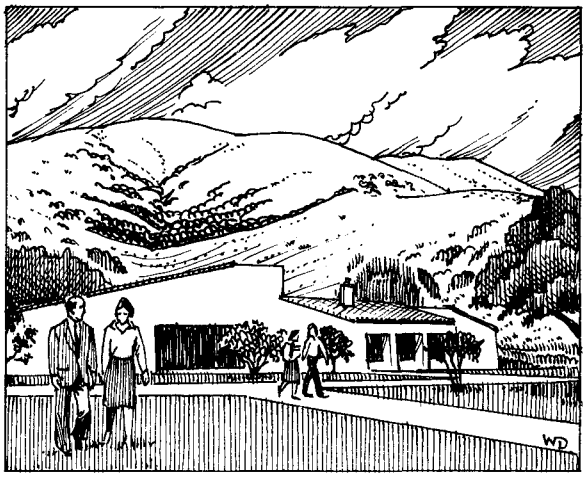

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THE SHUTTER

by J.C. Hall

"There were eleven windows showing between the wooden trellis covered with ivy. One shutter in the middle was put there for symmetry only, but I often dream about this mysterious room which does not exist behind the closed shutter."

—*Anais Nin:* Journals

I too. Only last night I climbed
That fragile stair, more like a ghost
Than man, to turn the knob
And venture in, too much afraid almost.

All our imagined furniture:
Secretaire, letters in purple skein,
Firescreen before the dying coals—
A room expecting to be dreamt again.
Illusions of life and art!
That porcelain too frail to dust,
Those private messages . . . As I went in
I trembled for such trust.

Shall I tell you the secret then?
Something, my dear, you'd never guess.
Nothing. Only the slit moonlight falling
On floors of emptiness.

If I flung back the shutter and leant out,
Straining my eyes towards the shadowed place
Where you wait like an effigy,
Would you believe my face?

J.C. Hall's most recent volume of poetry is Selected and New Poems, 1939-84 *(Secker & Warburg).*

---

turn constructs an appropriate kind of time. If we can tell a story about our predicament, we have made enough sense of it to discern what alternatives for action are offered and need not respond to it out of some automatism or reflex. The problem with the novel form is that its implicit assumption of psychic automatism frustrates the purpose of tale-telling, which is to propose alternatives. Modernism often counsels us to live in the moment because modernist narrative sees time as a single set of rails to which we are fixed, and from which the only escape is by a denial of time. But the classical narrative genres do not propose the same temporal geometry; in the tale, for instance, the primacy of plot over characterization paradoxically leaves the protagonist free, responsible, and creative.

By narrative, then, we tell ourselves the story of ourselves and thus learn how to be a coherent and effective self. The story is the central operation by which we are able to love and to work. Certain types of mental illness might well be characterized as lesions in the narrative capacity. The inability to see other people's point of view and the inability to string the moments of time together in a valuable and meaningful way are characteristic of a certain type of narcissistic or borderline personality which is now showing up in the therapists' waiting rooms. It also shows up in the characters and implied narrators in postmodern fictions by the likes of Raymond Carver and Anne Beatty.

It seems to me that the time has come to rethink our whole aesthetic and ethic of narrative and fiction, as we rethink, from our oddly detached viewpoint in this transitional period we call postmodern, the fundamentals of all our arts. If we regard ourselves as at a beginning rather than as at an ending, we will find enormous opportunities for artistic achievement. We must examine the great traditions of all the world's cultures, compare them with what we are coming to know about the human nervous system and human evolution, and actively seek out the inbuilt grammar by which our creativity operates. The "natural-classical" forms, as I have called them, are those forms arising in all traditions which are demonstrably tuned to the chemistry, rhythmicity, and anatomy of the human brain in such a way as to enhance our capacity to make moral, aesthetic, and philosophical sense of the world, and to make us effective in it as individuals and as a community. These forms are embedded in our genetic makeup by their value to our prehistoric ancestors, and in using them we reunite ourselves with the immediacy of their oral, performed, magical, and kinetic ritual.

Once such a traditional genre is mastered, it feels to the artist like an immensely powerful and sensitive instrument, by which tasks one would never have dreamed of accomplishing become feasible. Its range of options—every great genre is both a collection of possibilities for creation and a method for generating more—suggest entirely new ways for the artist to develop and manifest her creative individuality. An artist becomes the more himself, the less he is confined within the monotonous voice of his own everyday subjectivity. There is a certain self-regard which can ruin an artist quite as it can ruin a friend—and for similar reasons. A traditional genre, with its demand for technical craftsmanship, fictive invention, and sympathetic objectivity, can reroute the energies of that self-concern and make them productive rather than paralyzing. The result is often, strangely enough, a much deeper probing of psychological truth than is the barren posturing of the naked ego upon the empty stage of modernist or postmodernist "freedom." At the same time, the artist is truly united with the grave or hilarious ghosts of his predecessors and successors in the genre. The immortality of art perhaps consists more in this piety than in the memory of a name.

How might the renaissance I have suggested be accomplished in narrative? As I have implied, much might be done simply refurbishing the old narrative genres and using them to revision the contemporary world. Again, it is high time that narrative be reunited with verse, drama, and the richest and deepest philosophical discourse. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is the possibility that science fiction may have arisen as an authentic response to our need for myths to give coherence and meaning to the universe. If this is so, we need only graft this new manifestation of the mythopoeic impulse to the old, to have at our disposal an artistic instrument of great power, ready and able to supply the story material for a new epic of our times.

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VISIONARY FICTION *by Fred Chappell*

Susan had set up the ironing board in the kitchen and upended the iron there while she sprinkled her blouse. I could not detect the heat waves rising from the face of the iron, but the morning sun showed them clearly on the refrigerator door, curling and uncurling in hypnotic arabesque. That became my image for visionary fiction: *the play of the shadows of our invisible realities.*

Alas. The shine soon wears off such nifty formulations. For someone else, the phrase might equally well describe religious painting, music, or even mathematics. Still I'm attracted to it, partly because of its Platonic overtones, mostly because the sort of literature I am trying to delineate is devilish hard to define.

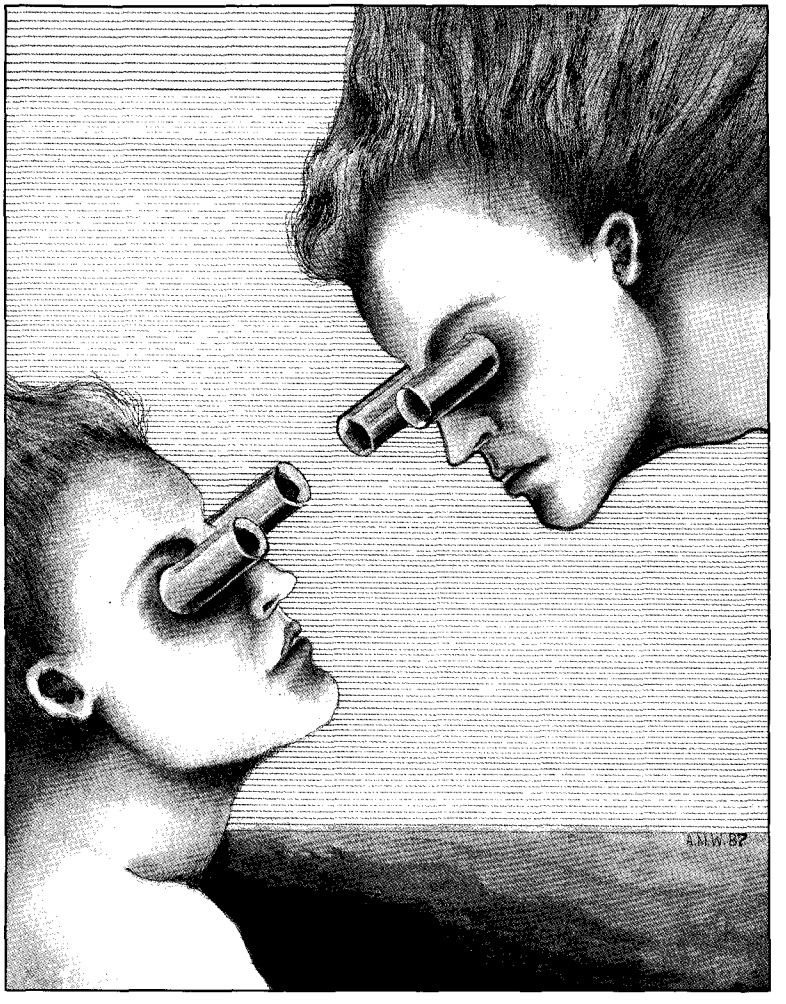
Visionary fiction, as I conceive of it, cuts across several genres but totally includes, or is included by, none of them. It is fantasy, of course, but it is not heroic fantasy of the sword-and-sorcery type in which leather-clad heroes with leatherbound brains do battle with evil magicians. Conan the Conqueror lacks—to put it delicately—sufficient delicacy. It may occasionally appear as science fiction, as with C.S. Lewis' *Perelandra*, but generally it does not do so. Technology, with its fluorescent glare and antiseptic atmosphere, is inimical to the half-lights and shifting shades of the visionary modes. Visionary fiction is always allegorical, but it is not straightforward political allegory like Kafka's *The Trial*, nor scientific allegory like E.A. Abbott's *Flatland*, not simple religious allegory like *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is sometimes utopian in nature, but not politically utopian; and it is never dystopian. The great wrongs that visionary fiction addresses are more ancient and more profound than political wrongs.

Its literary ancestry is various and noble, including not only the fairy tale and the pastoral romance but also the epic poetry of the marvelous, like *The Odyssey*, and the knightly romance, like *The Faerie Queene*. To these influences must be added the overmastering one of the Bible, especially the books of Genesis, Job, the Song of Solomon, and Revelations. It absorbs the thoughts of the philosophers, particularly those of Plato and the neo-Platonists, but also the later ones of figures like Berkeley, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Jung. It is at pains to ally itself closely with Romantic narrative poetry like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Alastor*, and *Endymion*. A lesser but still notable influence will be that of the Gothic novel in its "Oriental" guise; William Beckford's *Vathek* is in the farther background. The masque as we find it in Milton's *Comus* is extremely important, but the single most important influence is that of *The Divine Comedy*.

The familiarity of this list of influences gives us a clue. Visionary fiction, even as it is practiced in the 20th century, is deeply Victorian and profoundly English in temperament and outlook. It is written—and perhaps mostly read—by writers of gentle and retiring, even reclusive, character. One imagines that there are great bales of the stuff lying unpublished in the secret cabinets of vicars, philosophers, and emeritus mathematicians. This notion helps to describe in part the sometimes fusty charm of the works.

It helps to account too for the allergic reaction that many readers have toward it. We are speaking here of such books as Ruthven Todd's *The Lost Traveller*, William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land*, Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, Robert Graves's *Watch the North Wind Rise*, Lydia Obukhova's *Daughter of Night*, Sedagh Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*, George Macdonald's *Lilith* and *Phantastes*, and of David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*. There are readers, maybe even a majority of them, to whom fantasy is anathema; they would echo the complaint of Heerbrand in E.T.A. Hoffman's *The Golden Flower Pot*. "By your leave, worthy Herr Archivarius," he says, "this is Oriental bombast, and we beg very much you would rather . . . give us something of your own most remarkable life, of your travelling adventures, for instance; above all, *something true.*"

The good Heerbrand's objection is full to bursting with ironies. An easier one is that in Archivarius' fable of Lily and Phosphorous, he has given a literal account of his own



Fred Chappell's most recent book is Source *(Louisiana State University Press).*

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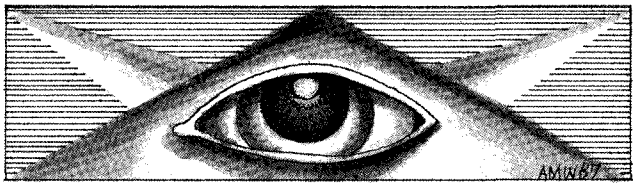
birth. Another is that realistic fiction is none so real as its admirers like to pretend. Naturalism especially tends to verge toward, and often to break into, phantasmagoria in its moments of harshest intensity. If the climaxes of such works as Frank Norris' *The Pit* or Zola's *Germinal* or *L'Assomoir* stood separate and complete, no one would ever recognize them as realistic.

In the end, the strictest adherent of realism would deprive us even of the parables of Jesus. With his cold insistence on the "bottom line" of literary discourse, he sees it all as a particular kind of sermonizing, and he would like the sermons without exempla. He exhibits the blindness that visionary fiction is designed to alleviate.



Yet he is correct about the nature of its deficiencies. The visionary mode can make no pretense of any broad understanding of society or politics or culture; it draws no figures who embody the aspirations of a social or economic class; it never deals with racism, economic struggle, labor problems, or agrarian ruin. When it sometimes deals with political injustice, it does so only by oblique implication. It is directly concerned with the problem of the salvation of the individual soul by means of its understanding of itself and through its commerce with superior beings.

These superior beings may be avatars or representatives of God; or they may be lesser gods of one sort or another; or they may be supernatural entities like angels or demons; or they may be fantastic or ordinary persons with special knowledge or powers. In visionary fiction we meet crones and witches, magicians, priests, philosophers, poets, artists, singers, "little people" like elves, dwarves, or children, and wise animals with the ability to speak, unicorns or ravens or wolves.

The purposes of all these figures are threefold: They make possible or at least facilitate the questing protagonist's entry into the Other World; they guide him through this world and explain, in whatever manner they see fit, the significance of the objects in it and of the events that take place; and they usually—though they do not always—see the traveler safe home again.

This Other World that is journeyed through has a symbiotic nature. Seemingly independent in itself, it is actually only our ordinary, everyday world transvalued. It is a strange and marvelous world in which spiritual understanding, though not easy, is a firm possibility—as it is for only a very few of us in the world we are accustomed to. But that shortcoming is, as E.T.A. Hoffman points out, our own fault: "Favourable reader, while you are in the faery world of glorious wonder, where both rapture and horror may be evoked; where the goddess of earnestness herself will waft her veil aside and show her countenance . . . while you are in this region which the spirit lays open to us in dreams, make an effort to recognize the well-known forms which hover around you in fitful brightness even in ordinary life. You will then find that this glorious kingdom lies much closer at hand than you ever supposed." Lord Dunsany jokes that his novel mostly shows no more than "the face of the fields we know, and ordinary English woods and a common village and valley," and he adds that these scenes are at least "a good twenty or twenty-five miles from the border of Elfland."

In visionary fiction, a searching dialectic obtains between the two worlds. The world we live in physically exists; it only makes no sense. Its sister world, the one the author has invented or discovered, may or may not exist physically, but it makes a highly dramatic spiritual sense. Yet it cannot exist alone, since it is finally an interpretation of our customary world. It is mysterious, but its mysteries are oblique explanations of the world we ordinarily live in and ordinarily do not understand.

This dialectic asserts a primacy between them. The visionary author will come down heavily in favor of the fields we know. In Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, the quester Maskull and his companion guide Polecrab stray through the genuinely strange but utterly convincing landscape of Tormance. Yet Maskull observes that "this world of yours, and perhaps mine too, for that matter, doesn't give me the slightest impression of a dream, or an illusion, or anything of the sort. I know it's really here at this moment, and it's exactly as we're seeing it, you and I. Yet it's false. It's false in this sense, Polecrab. Side by side with it another world exists, and that other world is the true one, and this one is deceitful, to the very core."

The author asserts the primacy of our customary world because it is, after all, the subject matter of his work; the life lived within it is the substance under the examination of his extraordinary lens. The form that a visionary fiction takes is, then, almost invariably that of an educational journey. His odyssey through a landscape peopled with angels and demons, mages and monsters, opens the traveler's eyes to the glories and terrors of his mundane existence—which is now at last comprehended to be a supramundane existence.

A transcendent harmony is the goal aimed at. After Mr. Vane, the half-willing searcher of George Macdonald's *Lilith*, has endured his necessary trials, he discovers this harmony. "My bare feet seemed to love every plant they trod upon. The world and my being, its life and mine, were one. The microcosm and macrocosm were at length atoned, at length in harmony." He has attained this knowledge of harmony in the Other World, but he is determined to carry it back with him into the world of his former existence:

> Now I knew that life and truth were one; that life mere and pure is in itself bliss; that where being is not bliss, it is not life, but life-in-death. Every inspiration of the dark wind that blew where it listed, went out a sigh of thanksgiving. At last I was. I lived, and nothing could touch my life.

This passage, lifted out of the context of *Lilith*'s happy ending, may be too easy, may sound too Pollyanna, for contemporary taste. W.H. Auden remarked that "the Scylla and Charybdis of Dream Literature are incoherence and mechanical allegory," but there is another worse danger too. It continually runs the risk of falling into soft religiosity, into Sunday school pietism, into a kind of Pre-

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Raphaelite sappiness. Perhaps this is a danger for any literature in which the happy ending is necessary to its ritualistic structure.

Yet the best of visionary fiction is careful to take account of the grand tragic element of our lives, and to absorb it in a larger scheme of things. Tragedy is no longer perceived as we usually perceive it, as the sum of all the terrible things that happen to us, or as an essential and bottomless emptiness of existence. It is a given meaning as a necessary part of the harmony of the whole and is one of the few elements of daily life that is not transfigured in the Other World. As the raven tells Macdonald's journeyer, "Why, Mr. Vane, but for the weeping in it, your world would never have become worth saving."

As an acutely conscious literature of the Born Again, visionary fiction is constrained to be built upon some straitly held set of religious or philosophical beliefs. Still, it must avoid any merely sectarian evangelism. It does not matter to the overall design what kind of beliefs are promulgated, since what is most at stake is a transfiguration of quotidian *secular* life. The beliefs are usually Christian, but they may be fiercely pagan, as in Graves's *Watch the North Wind Rise*, or even Jungian, as in Miguel Serrano's *The Visits of the Queen of Sheba*. In Hoffman's story the subject of faith is poetry. A smug bourgeois Dresden is invaded by the realm of pure poetry, and the confused student Anselmus is taken captive by it. "Were you not even now in Atlantis; and have you not at least a pretty little copyhold farm there, as the poetical possession of your inward sense? And is the blessedness of Anselmus anything else but a living in poesy? Can anything else but poesy reveal itself as the sacred harmony of all beings, as the deepest secret of nature?"

This harmony is realized when the two worlds are at last recognized as one and the same. That is a recognition not easily or cheaply achieved, but the best and most perceptive of visionary novelists would approve it in much the same terms as Novalis when he wrote, "Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one."

Here then I sat, watching the heat-shadows from Susan's General Electric steam iron play upon the refrigerator door. It is a scene perfectly ordinary, boringly domestic, idly inconsequential—or, to perceive more truly, perfectly extraordinary, blissfully domestic, and charged with powerful consequence: one of the infinite number of thresholds to the Other World.

"Its insights have guided my own thinking and I am proud to count myself as one of your students." —RONALD REAGAN

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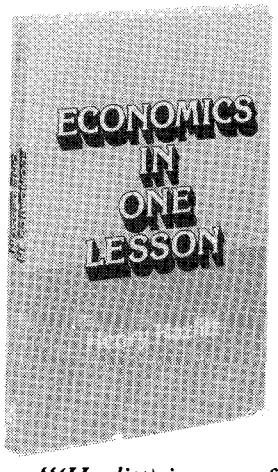

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A CHILD'S JOKE *a story by Leon Steinmetz*

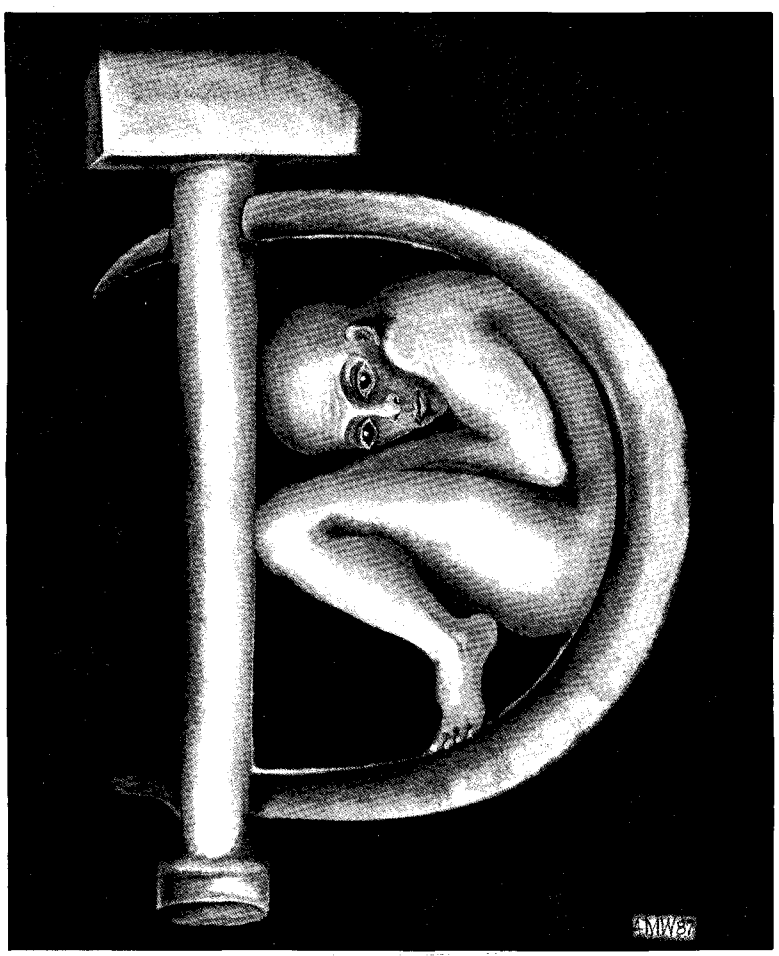
The sea, warm and quiet, lay in front of me. Dusk was falling, and there was a strong smell of brine and kelp in the air.

I was sitting on a piece of a ruined ancient column on the shore of the Black Sea and couldn't quite believe that just a few hours earlier I had been in cold and wet November Moscow.

That morning I was awakened in my Moscow apartment by the sound of branches beating against my window. I opened my eyes and saw these wet, wind-tossed branches, the houses awash in torrents of rain, the passersby hunched over beneath the penetrating wind, and, suddenly, I felt so miserable that I knew I would simply die if I didn't immediately get away from there to somewhere in the sun for at least a week.

Not giving it another thought, I packed my suitcase, hailed a cab, and went to the airport.

I had decided to fly South, to Akulinsk, a small town in the Crimea, where I had never been and which, as I had often heard, was a quiet and lovely spot.



Leon Steinmetz's short stories have appeared in Webster Review *and* Commentary. *He has taught creative writing at Williams and Wellesley and is currently teaching at Harvard.*

The season was over, and I had no trouble getting a room in an inexpensive hotel. Without unpacking, I threw my suitcase down in the room, rented a bicycle at the hotel, and set out for the sea.

The sun was setting. I left the town behind and rode along the shore. The road was deserted. I had been riding for about half an hour when up ahead, to the side of the road, I saw the remains of an ancient amphitheater. The stone steps, overgrown with grass, climbed the slope of the hill. Walking my bike, I went up. I laid the bike on the steps at the top and sat down on a piece of a ruined column. Perhaps the Greeks had once celebrated their mysteries here. Over there, down below, had probably been a pier. A narrow street led from it to the temple. The broken off triangle of its pediment soared up to the sky by the columns, gleamed golden under the setting sun. . . .

I had grown so pensive that I didn't see where he had come from. That character, who looked like a bum. Thin, unshaven, incredibly tall, dressed in some kind of poncho, he stood not far from me and looked at the sea.

I moved closer to my bike.

He stood for a while, then, along the steps of the amphitheater, went down the hill. He walked across the amphitheater, across the stage, and stopped beside the columns. And then I noticed a sack and a paint-box propped against one of the columns. The bum took a small folding chair out of the sack, opened the box, and began to paint.

The weariness of a long and varied day, the regular lapping of waves running onto the shore got the better of me. I closed my eyes and dozed off.

I woke up when I began to feel chilly. A thin scarlet band over the sea indicated the spot where the sun had gone down. Shivering and regretting that I hadn't taken a sweater, I got up and began flapping my arms to warm myself. "And that weirdo is still there. I wonder what he's painting?" Skipping down the steps, I went to him.

He was sitting very close to the sea. His canvas depicted water. He painted with short, quick strokes, not paying any attention to me and muttering something under his breath.

The scarlet band at the horizon had now vanished, and, as it usually happens in the South, rapidly began to get dark. He leaned toward his sack, took out a kerosene lamp, lit it, and continued to paint by its light.

I stood beside him a little longer, then clambered up to my bicycle and headed for the hotel.

At the turn of the road I glanced back. A faint yellow flame was flickering between the columns near the water.

When I reached the hotel it was completely dark.

It is a habit of mine, whenever I travel, always to visit the local museum. So, the next day I found it on the map (it was located across the town) and decided to take a walk there.

Akulinsk was a typical Southern, provincial town: narrow streets winding over the hills; low, whitewashed houses with

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flat roofs; tiny squares with monuments to the heroes of the civil war in green-tarnished bronze trousers.

Provincial towns like these can easily depress you, if you happen to wind up in one when you are not in the right mood. But to me, after cold and wet Moscow, these white stucco houses, the small dusty squares, even the 30-year-old buses straining to crawl up the humpbacked streets seemed very nice and cheerful.

The museum was housed in an imposing squat building, the former summer residence—as the plaque at the entrance informed—of the famous philanthropist Arkhideev, whose collection furnished its basis.

I bought a ticket and went inside.

A room of ancient art—Roman portraits on pedestals stared at me, the statue of Trajan in the corner, the enormous foot of Constantine against the wall.

Right after the ancient art came the room of Socialist Realism—Lenin at the Second Congress, Lenin at the Third Congress, Karl Marx with his four daughters. I passed through it without stopping and found myself in a small, round hall of old European paintings.

And here I saw him again. That bum who had been painting yesterday among the ruins. In the same ridiculous poncho and clumsy boots, towering a head above everyone, he walked around the hall. Sometimes, setting his spindle legs apart, he would stoop very close to a painting, then, taking a few steps back and cupping his hand like a telescope, he would look at the painting through it.

To my surprise, there were several very decent "Little Dutch Masters" in the hall, a nice portrait from the Perugino School, and a beautiful landscape of Canaleto, *Morning on the Grand Canal*. I leaned closer to it, to get a better look at the tiny gondolier reflected in the light-green water, when a cleated heel crashed down on my open sandal and an elbow punched me hard in the stomach.

"I'm sorry!" The yesterday's bum was looming over me. "I was just backing up . . . you okay?"

"I guess . . . "

It was a kind of awkward scene. We stood there staring at each other, I rubbing my solar plexus.

"You sure?"

"Yes, I'm all right." Actually, my foot was in pain and my stomach hurt. I should probably go back to the hotel, I thought. "Which bus goes to the 'Mermaids'?" I asked him.

"The fourth. You have to go there?"

"Yes."

"I'll drive you."

"It's not really necessary."

"Well, it is, your foot is all red." He was right. My foot was red and swollen. I moved my toes. None seemed to be broken, though. "I'll feel better if I drive you there," he said, scratching his unshaven cheek.

I don't know whether it was the apologetic expression on his face or simply the fact that my foot hurt. "Thanks," I said.

We walked out onto the street.

A shabby motorcycle with a paint-box in its sidecar was tied to a tree near the museum. "Have a seat." He pushed the paint-box deeper inside.

I climbed into the sidecar, he mounted the seat, and we took off.

"Staying at the 'Mermaids'?" he asked after we had driven for a while.

"Yes."

"Where from?"

"Moscow."

"Ha, the Harlot on Seven Hills!"

"What?" I didn't understand.

But he didn't explain.

For the rest of the trip he didn't utter a word more. I also was silent.

"All right," he stopped in front of the hotel. And then I said, "Listen," I said, "would you like to have a cup of coffee with me?" I don't know why I said that, really.

He thought for a moment. "Well, why not?"

The coffee we decided to wash down with beer. Gradually, he got talkative. I learned that his name was Matvey and that he had an eight-year-old son. I also learned that his wife and mother-in-law were mixers at the local soap plant. He had graduated from art school as a painter, but now too worked for this plant ("part-time, though," he said), drawing soap-bar wrappers.

I told him that about a month ago I gave up writing a novel and was now writing a play. And that this play wasn't going well.

"What's it about?" he asked.

"Hard to describe. There are two art collectors there."

"Well, that's a very important theme, for only art can redeem people," he declared solemnly. "You know, I can make a mint painting political stuff. But what for? What's the purpose? Money is just . . . " he tore a scrap of foil off the beer bottle and crushed it with his fingers " . . . dust and ashes!"

His head was small, his hair light and fluffy. Watery blue eyes sat very close to the sides of his long beaky nose. Whom does he resemble so much? I thought. And then suddenly realized. Ostrich! Yes, of course, a sad, ruffled ostrich.

"Are we born into this world just to pile up *things* and these bits of paper named 'money'? Or are we born to understand something while we are alive? You tell me!" he insisted, looking at me intently.

He was slightly crazy, obviously, but there was something quite appealing about him. By the time our table at the diner got crammed with empty beer bottles, he said to me: "You mentioned you had painted a bit before, would you like to drive around and paint with me?"

"I was just an amateur. Besides, I haven't held a brush for five years."

"Doesn't matter. You'll pick it up again."

Well, maybe it's not a bad idea. After all, I came here to relax, I thought. And I bought a paint-box, some paints, and began traveling around with him.

In the morning he would pick me up at the "Mermaids," and we would go. He knew the Akulinsk environs like the back of his hand and, like a real cicerone, showed them to me. It was November, there were no vacationers, and the countryside was deserted.

"The Cove of Sards," he would say pulling his motorcycle up on a cliff above the tiny round inlet. "The best place to look for chicken gods."

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"What chicken gods?"

"That's what sards with a hole in the middle are called. Water makes the holes, and you can string them and wear them around your neck. People say they're lucky. Tolik, my son, recently found two."

Most of all, though, he liked to show me the ancient ruins. As it turned out, there were many of them scattered around Akulinsk.

"Great places were once here, on the shores of the Pontus Euxinus," he would say pensively, calling the Black Sea by its ancient Greek name.

And we would sit down and paint. Squeezing the viscous, thick, bright caterpillars of paint onto my palette, I tried, the best I could to depict the sea, the sky, the rocks, the faded grass. . . .

As for Matvey, he didn't paint any of this. Usually he set up his paint-box very close to the sea and painted only water.

"Why are you painting just water?" I asked him.

"I'm trying to penetrate its essence," he replied. "It's one of the four elements that make up the universe. Earth, fire, and air are the other three, and I want to penetrate their essence. I need it for the canvas I'm working on now."

"I feel you understand what I am talking about. Ida, my wife, loves me, but she doesn't understand what I'm doing," he said to me once. We were riding through the center of Akulinsk—he in the driver's seat, I crouched in the sidecar. It was Sunday and the streets were busy with people. "You see, I can't stop thinking about the universe, I can't stop thinking that some insignificant number of years will pass like a blip and no one of these people," he nodded around, "not one of them will exist."

"There'll be others, don't worry," I said.

"Yes, exactly, the others. But these, I mean *these* people who're now bustling about with all the thoughts whirling in their heads, and all their fears, and feelings—these people will be no more . . . "

The traffic light went red in front of us and we stopped.

" . . . And I just can't understand," he continued, "why people think and worry so much about trifles—a promotion, a stupid quarrel, to buy or not to buy something, and yet think so little about what'll happen to them when they cross that boundary, although it can happen to any one of us at any moment!" He was very agitated now. "Who, tell me, who can be sure, when awakening in the morning, that he'll live till evening? No one! The boundary between 'here' and 'there,' it's like a film of a soap bubble! . . . "

"Green light, let's go," I said.

" . . . Now one is alive, and 'here,' " he continued, not listening to me, his Adam's apple going up and down his scrawny neck, " . . . a split second, and he's dead and 'there,' and joins those who were before him . . . "

"We're holding up traffic," I said. Horns started honking behind us.

"And maybe the grocer who sells me milk in the morning dies in the evening and sees Alexander the Great or Michelangelo!"

"But maybe he doesn't. Maybe there's no Alexander the Great over there," I said. "Maybe people just disappear, vanish, as if they had never existed, fall through into darkness and that's it."

"Oh, no, no! There can't be darkness there! No way!" he exclaimed, revving the engine.

One day he invited me to his place. "I want you to see my canvas and to have dinner with us," he said.

He lived outside of town, not far from those ancient ruins where I had first seen him. We drove along an unpaved, dusty street, turned around a stretch of desolated land, and stopped beside a long, wooden house which looked like a barrack.

In front of the house some scraggy chickens were kicking up the dust. Sheets were flapping on a line. Between the sheets several children were running, brandishing their wooden swords.

"Tolik!" Matvey called out.

A skinny, light-haired boy with a bandaged knee broke away from the other kids and ran up to us.

"What?"

"Nothing. Just wanted to say 'hi,'" Matvey stroked his neck. "Is mother back?"

"No, not yet. And grandma's gone to get some cabbage," the boy said, looking seriously now at me, now at his father. He was small and puny and looked younger than his eight years.

"Hey, mouse," one of the kids shouted, "you playing?"

"Yes!" Tolik shouted back, "can I?" he looked at his father.

Matvey nodded, "We'll call you when dinner's ready."

A long, dirty corridor with many doors was dimly lit by two naked bulbs. A smell of stale things, food, cats, mildew, hung in the air. Some of the doors were ajar. A march was heard blaring over the radio somewhere.

"Our apartment's over there, at the end," Matvey said walking before me.

Several darkened gas stoves stood along the corridor. On one, a bully character, naked to the waist, with tattoos on both shoulders, was frying onions. On another, an obese old woman was stirring laundry boiling in a washtub. At her feet a small boy sat on the floor, holding a live turtle and trying to break off its leg.

We walked to the end of the corridor, Matvey opened the door, and I saw a room. A plywood cupboard, a chair, a simple iron bedstead and an unpainted table near it made up its furnishings. At an angle to the bed stood a child's cot, above which a homemade rug hung on the wall. A shaggy wolf, with his tongue hanging out, and a little girl in a red hood talking to him among the silk trees were appliquéd on the gray burlap.

"This is my mother-in-law's and Tolik's room."

Squeezing between the table and the cupboard we went into the next room, which was even smaller than the first.

"And this is Ida's and mine," Matvey said.

A bed with a cheap blanket took up almost the entire space of the room. Two shelves, piled up with canvases, books, rolls of paper, folders, brushes, bottles of varnish, jars of paint ran along the wall over the bed.

A huge canvas, covered by a piece of cloth, was propped against the opposite wall.

"It's too big to see it so close," Matvey said, "you should stand on the bed and lean back against the wall, then you'll

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scope it out."

I removed my shoes and climbed onto the bed.

Matvey pulled the cloth off.

Vigorous black lines, here and there touched by color, ran over the entire canvas. The lines twisted into spirals, fell down, soared up; naked bodies, some winged figures, gusty tongues of flame, heaved up mountains could be discerned in them. Light and dark were wrestling there like two living beings.

"This is great!" I said.

"You like it?"

"I do indeed. What is it?"

"I haven't finished it yet. It's the Battle of the Angels with the Devil. As Saint John said, 'Michael and his angels were battling the Devil, and the Devil and his hordes were battling them!' And this battle," he exclaimed, "you see, this battle is still going on, now more than ever! They're wrestling for our souls. I *see* them clinching in the air. Like this!" he clinched his hands and attempted to move in the room, but since there was nowhere to move, sank down on the bed.

Women's voices and the clatter of dishes were heard from the other room. They had, apparently, begun setting the table.

". . . There's another thing I'm pondering over," he continued, "how to make sure my painting's not going to deteriorate. Almost all pictures painted after the 18th century are darkening and getting cracks, but the old masters are shining. Why's that? What's the secret? For three years I've been pondering over it, and, you know, I think I'm close now. I'm sure they used eucalyptus balsam for their primers. I spent a year making the primer for this canvas. The secret is, they ground the stuff not into linseed oil, as everybody thinks, but into cedar oil, you see! If you put cedar oil in the sun for a couple of months, it settles, and then you add eucalyptus balsam and you get an astonishingly firm surface. That's for the primer, and for the paints, I recently ran across a description in an old manuscript of how the medieval monks made their colors. You know what they did? They added honey and egg white to their pigments and, also, bees. Really, can you believe it, crushed, dried bees!"

"What for?"

"For the wax," he said excitedly. "I tried it, and that's absolutely amazing! Want to take a look?" He took from the shelf a jar with paint and opened it. "Just smell that honey! And look, what a smoothness. Put a drop on your finger! Isn't it beautiful!"

For dinner, we had cabbage soup and boiled potatoes. We could all barely fit at the small table. I, as a guest, sat on the only chair; Ida, beside her mother, on the bed; Matvey and Tolik on the cot, with Tolik on top of three pillows.

"Ran into Sergey's wife today," the old woman said, ladling the soup from the pot into the dishes. "She said they've bought a new apartment. Will be moving soon. Everybody's fine. Only we're in the pits."

The old woman was tall and skinny, with a small bony face and big red hands. From her appearance you would think she was Matvey's mother rather than Ida's.

"Mama, please . . . " Ida said quietly.

Ida was a small, thin woman who faded early.

"What 'please'? I'm not saying anything. That Sergey went to the same art school as him," the old woman said to me, nodding at Matvey. "The man is a moron, but he makes money hand over fist—all from his pictures!"

"Sergey serves the lie. He's a lost man," Matvey said.

"Lost!" the old woman exclaimed smacking the pot with a ladle. "The guy has two apartments, a wife dressed up like a doll, and he calls him 'lost.' And look who's talking! We don't have enough to buy an extra chair . . . "

"Mama, I beg you, we have a guest now," Ida said.

"That's right! Maybe at least because of the guest he'll get ashamed of how we live."

"But for God's sake, mother, I've told you. Matvey'll finish the canvas and then start doing something about money. Are you having a good time in Akulinsk?" Ida turned to me, evidently trying to switch the subject.

But the old woman wouldn't stop.

"I know how he'll start doing," she muttered. "For years he's been doing this garbage. Painting devils! If, instead of devils, for all these years he'd been making pictures like Sergey's, we'd have our own apartment too, and wouldn't be living in this hell!"

"Not just for an apartment, for my life, I wouldn't do what Sergey does. Painting all those Lenins and Marxes . . . selling his soul for money!"

"You just listen to him!" the old woman exclaimed disgustedly. "He finds words real good, drumming about all these souls and demons and devils. I'm old, and I don't believe in that s--t. And you, a young guy, should be ashamed to hammer away these words like some old illiterate jerk. It's sickening to listen to it!"

"Don't listen then."

"And I wouldn't, and I wouldn't look, but it turns my stomach, when I know that for five pictures like Sergey does we could buy a nice apartment. Take a look around. Aren't you ashamed to keep a family like this?" She was getting real heated now.

Matvey sat silently, bending his head over his plate and eating his soup, as if he didn't hear her.

"The soup is excellent. It was mama's idea to put the dill in," Ida tried again.

"What the hell are you talking about?" the old woman shouted at her. "Don't you hide your eyes," she turned to Matvey. "Look at your son," she poked her finger at Tolik. "The boy runs around like a ragamuffin, and his father paints devils. People like you should be forbidden to have children!"

"You have no right to say this to me!" Matvey slammed down his spoon.

"Matti, don't! Mama, that's enough, stop it!" Ida exclaimed.

Tolik, apparently used to such scenes, sat there calmly, and taking from his plate the circles of boiled carrot, laid them out on the table.

"What do you mean stop it? I won't let you shut me up!" the old woman shouted. "Am I talking about myself? Am I thinking about myself? I wish I were dead and not seeing all this!"

Her small face puckered up suddenly and tears spurted

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from her eyes. She jumped up from the table, grabbed her coat, which hung on a nail on the door, and rushed out of the room.

"Mama . . . " Ida ran after her.

"She'll calm down," she said returning shortly. "She'll be all right. She had a fight with the neighbors today, that's why she's like that. I'm sorry," she said to me.

"Listen, daddy," Tolik said, "they told us in school today that there're five parts of the world. Is it true, or is it also a pack of lies?"

"This time they told the truth, strangely enough," Matvey said.

"Tolik, not everything they say in school is a lie," said Ida.

"Almost everything," Matvey said.

"Matti, stop it, what're you teaching him! Tolik, don't listen to him. You better tell me why you fished all the carrots out of your soup again?"

"'Cause I hate them. Say, daddy," he turned to Matvey, "can you color maps?"

"What maps?"

"For geography. I'll show you," he bent down, pulled a map from under his cot, and spread it on the table. It was a blue contour map of the world. "See, we've got to color each part different."

They both bent over the map. Their heads touched.

"When is it due?" Matvey rubbed his chin against Tolik's fluffy crown.

"By tomorrow. Stop tickling."

"Well, then we better do it tonight. Listen," he turned to me, "how much longer are you planning to stay in Akulinsk?"

"I don't know. A few days at least."

"So you can stay till the weekend?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"In the mountains, about a three-hour drive from here, there's a small Apollo temple of the first century. I want to show it to you, but I'll be busy till the end of the week, got to draw a couple of wrappers. Saturday we could go though. What do you think?"

"Fine."

"Can I go with you?" Tolik said.

"Well, it's a bit of a long trip for you on the cycle, although . . . " Matvey looked at Ida.

"Where would you put him?" she said.

"In the sidecar, I suppose. Listen, maybe you can go too? You could sit behind me and they two in the sidecar, eh?"

She thought for a moment, "I think it would be nice."

"Hurray!" Tolik shouted.

"Now, we got to leave early Saturday," Matvey said to me, "so, at seven in the morning we'll pick you up at your hotel.

For the next few days I didn't see him.

I wandered about Akulinsk, painted its narrow, sun-flooded streets, dusty little squares . . . liked Matvey's family, and I thought about our trip with pleasure. And so, on Saturday, at 10 before seven, I was standing in front of my hotel, waiting for them. At seven o'clock, however, no one came. Since Matvey didn't have a phone, I couldn't call him. At eight I decided to take a cab and go to his place.

Raising the dust, the cab stopped near the low wooden house, which looked like a barrack. A breeze rocked the empty clothesline.

I went inside.

The long corridor with many doors was dead quiet. A weedy gray cat darted past me and disappeared somewhere.

The plywood cupboard, emptied and flung open, the child's cot, the table with its legs up, stood outside Matvey's door. What's going on? Are they moving?

I knocked.

The door opened, and someone's hand pulled me in.

A harsh light struck me in the eyes. The naked bulb must have had at least 200 watts. Because of that light and because of the presence of three cops, the small room seemed even smaller.

"Where to put him?" one of them asked.

"On the bed, next to the others!"

The mattress on the old woman's bed was propped up. On the bare springs in a row sat Tolik, Ida, the old woman, and Matvey.

"Your ID!" demanded the cop with a broad face and a short, hooked, owlish nose. He was, apparently, in charge.

The other two cops were much younger. One was holding a lined sheet of paper with a seal. His big, protruding ears stuck out from under his uniform cap.

"Should we proceed, sir?" he asked.

"Go on!"

On the small appliquéd rug, now thrown on the floor, canvases, sketches, drawings of various sizes and shapes were piled up. Winged angels, flung up hands, tongues of flame, clouds, stones filled them.

The third cop, who had a mustache, went into Matvey and Ida's room.

"What was your purpose in coming to Akulinsk?" the older cop asked me, turning my ID in his hands.

"Just to relax."

"Write," the mustachioed cop said to the one with the sheet, bringing several canvases from Matvey's room and throwing them onto the rug. "The old clenched hands. Child's fist. Two fingers."

"Your address in Akulinsk?" the old cop continued questioning me.

"The 'Mermaids,' number 14."

"How long have you known these people?"

"Not very long. Listen, why are you asking me all this? What's the meaning? . . ."

"Keep answering. I'm doing the questioning here."

"A devil with a green face. A devil with a violet face," the mustachioed cop brought out a few more canvases. "Three cobble stones."

Matvey sat motionless, clutching his fingers. At one moment he would look at the floor, then lift his head and look at the cops, then again look down and mumble something under his breath."

"Fire and an eye," the mustachioed cop said.

"What?"

"An eye. Just one eye."

"I pity you," Matvey said suddenly, raising his head and looking at the old cop. "You don't realize what you're doing, and whom you're serving."

"Matti . . . " Ida said.

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The old woman, who was sitting next to Matvey, stretched out her hand and, without a word, grabbed his sleeve.

But Matvey went on.

". . . You were given a chance—you were born a human—and you blew it. For that, in the next life, you'll be born a spider."

"Did you hear that?" the old cop turned to the one with the sheet. "Write it down. For calling a representative of the law a spider, you'll get a year in jail," he said to Matvey.

"A year in jail! You threaten me with a year in jail, when you'll be sentenced for eternity. Do you realize it? *For eternity*! And you'll never, ever, be a human again. You'll come back to earth as a spider, or even worse, as a microbe!"

"I've warned you. For that microbe you'll get another year!"

"Matti, I beg you," said Ida.

Matvey waved his hand and fell silent.

"Small ones're done, sir," the mustachioed cop said. "Only the big one's left, and some papers."

"Get the big one out, and put the papers into a separate bag!"

"Yessir!"

"Hold it! Lift it up! Turn the corner!" The young cops dragged the big canvas out of Matvey's room.

Tolik, in his nightshirt, sat beside Ida, staring at them, his naked knees trembling.

The search went for another hour. They shook out the laundry, then, with a crowbar, lifted some floorboards, poked the dry earth underneath.

"Well, that's about it," the old one said.

"Right, sir."

"You'll be hearing from us," he said to me, handing me back my ID.

And they left, taking along the canvases, sketches wrapped up in the rug, and the papers, which they had stuffed into a pillow case.

Matvey they took away with them.

"It's because of me," Tolik whispered barely audibly, when their steps had faded away in the corridor. "Because of me," he repeated. "I gave it to the teacher, Mama . . ."

"What did you give to the teacher?" Ida said bending toward him, her face wet with tears.

"I forgot to rip daddy's drawing out of my notebook, when I gave it to her," he said. "She asked me, 'Who drew that?' I said I didn't know. But she, probably, guessed. And now . . . they will . . . kill . . . him . . . "

He wanted to say something else, but he couldn't. He just kept opening and closing his mouth, like a fish which has been pulled onto the shore, and he was trembling more and more violently.

"Tolik!" Ida gripped his shoulders. "Tolik," she touched his forehead. "He's burning up! The doctor. We've got to get him to the doctor!" Frantically, she started pulling a shirt over his head. "Tolik! My God, he's almost unconscious! Mother!" She cried to the old woman.

But the old woman didn't hear her.

Her hands clinging to the springs of the bed, her head bent down, she repeated, rocking as in a trance: "I knew it . . . I knew it . . . I knew it . . . "

"Please, stay here, while I go and call the doctor," Ida said to me, rushing to the door, "or no, I'll stay here, you call. Please."

I dashed outside and ran to the phone booth.

Despite the cop's threats, however, Matvey was not jailed for a year, not even for a week. He was released in two days.

Nobody summoned me, and I bought a ticket to return to Moscow.

On the eve of my departure, we were sitting on the shore, not far from his house, among the ancient ruins where I had first seen him.

"Why did they come? What did it all mean?" I asked.

"Because of that drawing," he waved his hand.

"What drawing? Tolik mentioned something . . . "

"Yes, it was that. I drew a funny little picture to amuse him. It's a child's joke, really."

He picked up a pebble and with a few quick strokes drew five heads in the sand. The first—a huge, shaggy head with a tangled mass of hair and beard, was obviously, Karl Marx. The second—with less hair and shorter beard was, of course, Engels. Next came Lenin—balding, with a little goatee and a mustache. After him—Stalin, with just a mustache. And the last one, clean shaven and bald, was, undoubtedly, our current ruler.

"Well, that's what he accidentally gave to his teacher. And it had a caption, besides. 'Marxism goes bald' . . . poor kid . . . " Matvey lowered his head.

"How's he today?" I asked.

"Better. The doctor said it was a shock. . . . It's strange, really, that they released me so quickly. Just a warning. It's a different time, now, I suppose . . . well, all my canvases and notes they destroyed, though . . . "

"What?"

"Yeah, they said it's religious propaganda."

I couldn't speak. The words stuck in my throat. Matvey was also silent, looking down.

"But you know," he raised his head and looked at me, "this joke was just a pretext for him to destroy what I'm doing. But too soon he exults."

"Who exults?"

"The Devil, as Saint John said, the Devil with his hordes . . . You see, he thinks I'm defeated, but he's dead wrong. All my ideas are here," he slapped his forehead, "and my recipes for the primer and the colors they didn't find. I had something like a presentiment that it would happen, and a couple of weeks ago I recopied them all into a separate notebook and hid it in a flour-can. Here they are, all of them!" He pulled a small, thick notebook from inside his shirt. "Puff!" he blew the flour off the cover. "Want me to read you some?"

And he opened the notebook and started reading.

". . . Gently heat eucalyptus balsam over a delicate flame. Add into it the white of one egg. Then, pour in three spoons of light linden honey that has stood in the sun. And then, stirring slowly, add the finely powdered pigment . . . "

He read, and a long blue shadow stretched from him over the ground.

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Empire Strikes Back *by William Hawkins*

". . . To sit in darkness here hatching vain empires."
—Milton

Kitchener: *The Man Behind the Legend by Philip Warner,* New York: Atheneum; $15.95.

During his discussion of the overthrow of feudalism by the bourgeoisie in his classic *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* Joseph Schumpeter asked whether "in the end such complete emancipation was good for the bourgeois and his world." He concluded that it had not been. Capitalist society needs the "steel frame" of the precapitalist aristocracy and its values in order to survive. It was the "human material of feudal society" which "continued to rule the roost right to the end of the period of intact and vital capitalism."

> It filled the offices of state, officered the army, devised policies . . . and, though taking into account bourgeois interests, it took care to distance itself from the bourgeoisie.

The passing of this class was the principle reason Schumpeter believed that capitalism was doomed. Not that it would fail economically; Schumpeter was a firm believer in the *economic* superiority of capitalism. It would fail politically because "the bourgeois class is ill equipped to face the problems, both domestic and international, that have normally to be faced by a country of any importance."

> We have seen that the industrialist and the merchant, as far as they are entrepreneurs, also fill a function of leadership. But economic leadership of this type does not readily expand, like the medieval lord's military leadership, into the leadership of nations. On the contrary, the ledger and the cost calculation absorb and confine.

Schumpeter, by birth an Austrian, was attempting to warn his adopted United States of its weakness as a capitalist nation without a feudal past. A nation about to assume global responsibilities. The weakness Schumpeter perceived has been manifest on many occasions. The revolt of middle-class students during the Vietnam War

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comes readily to mind. Examples still abound. Polls on the air strike against Libya reveal that the "Yuppies" composed virtually the only group to oppose the raid. It will take more than a spirit of "democratic capitalism" to save the United States and the West.

The U.S. can produce the conservative leaders it needs if its "natural aristocracy" can acquire values other than those of the stock market. Certainly one of the sources of President Reagan's strength as a leader is his background as a cinema hero and rancher rather than as a lawyer or financier. For inspiration, one can always turn to biographies of great men who have exhibited proper values in the past. In this quest, the British Empire is always an attractive place to look because of a shared cultural heritage and the fact that Britain once held the position of global responsibility to which the U.S. is heir.

Philip Warner is a Senior Lecturer at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Author of several previous military histories and biographies, he knows military life and its culture well. He has chosen for his subject England's foremost soldier at the height of the Empire. Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916) was the son of a professional soldier, Col. Henry Horatio Kitchener. Like many builders of the Empire, Kitchener was born of English parents living in Ireland. His family was not wealthy, though the Colonel made a success of the bankrupt Irish estate he had bought from its creditors. The young Kitchener did not attend English public school, but a Swiss boarding school followed by the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich where he became an engineer. His experiences as a student were thus more demanding than most. He learned to work from dawn to midnight mastering details. He also acquired a knack for learning foreign languages.

He was an observer with the French Army during the Franco-Prussian War and with the Turks during the Russo-Turkish War. He thus learned early the folly of being unprepared for battle. He exhibited his courage in Palestine by staring down a Druse mob and his ambition in Cyprus by manipulating his superiors in an attempt to be posted to Egypt where he could see more action.

Egypt made his reputation. In 10 years (1882-1892) he advanced from a cavalry lieutenant to commander in chief of the Egyptian Army with the rank of major-general. He had advanced by talent rather than by money or influence. He was not very sociable, being shy and puritanical. He consistently failed in his attempts to find a suitable wife. His one engagement ended when his fiancée died of typhoid. All his other proposals were rejected (Warner dismisses the rumors that Kitchener's bachelorhood indicated any homosexual tendencies). However, as a military leader he was unsurpassed. He had a capacity to understand the situations he confronted. A reformer, he stressed the importance of training and logistics and exploited the advantages of the railroad and the machine gun. He could train native troops to levels of performance few had thought possible. He earned the title "The Man Who Must Be Obeyed," but also earned the loyalty of his troops by a willingness to endure their hardships on campaign.

His greatest victory was Omdurman (1898), in which his Anglo-Egyptian force of 26,000 men defeated successive attacks by 100,000 Dervishes, killing 16,000 of the enemy at a loss of only 48 of his own. This completed his systematic reconquest of the Sudan to avenge the death of Gen. Charles Gordon, who had been massacred at Khartoum in 1884 by the forces of "the Mahdi," a religious fanatic (Kitchener had served with the relief force which failed to reach Gordon in time). Omdurman was the site of the Mahdi's tomb which Kitchener destroyed, Gordon's nephew having the honor of throwing the Mahdi's bones into the Nile. Kitchener kept the skull as a trophy. This shocked the young Winston Churchill who was serving with the expedition. However, it was not so unusual. Sir Reginald Wingate, who tracked down the Mahdi's successor, the Khalifa, had the Khalifa's skull turned into a mug from which he drank a toast on each anniversary of the Omdurman victory. Wingate had been Kitchener's intelligence officer and would become governor-general of the Sudan.

After Omdurman, Kitchener met the French expedition which had penetrated to Fashoda to claim the southern Sudan. By deft diplomacy he defused a situation which threatened war between London and Paris. As a reward for Omdurman, he was made Lord Kitchener of Khartoum and was voted 30,000 pounds (about $1 million in today's value) by Parliament.

He was next sent to South Africa as second in command to Lord Roberts to reverse the early defeats of the Boer War. Kitchener took command (1900) after Roberts had defeated the Boers in open combat. Kitchener was left to deal with the years of guerrilla warfare that followed. Again, he understood the nature of the war. The Sudan had been won by long preparation leading to a decisive battle. South Africa would be different. A war of attrition concluded by negotiation. The Dervish cult had to be destroyed, the Boers had to be assimilated. Kitchener relocated the Boer population, built a web of 8,000 blockhouses, and sent mobile columns on "search and destroy" operations. He earned the respect of the tough Boer leaders. This mixed with generous terms led eventually to the war's end.

Though a national hero, he was disliked by the press and by the Liberals. The feeling was mutual. According to Warner, "Kitchener regarded journalists as detestable, a dangerous liability to Intelligence, and despicable as well." Kitchener had little regard for politicians but was a known supporter of the Conservative Party. He was a close friend of the Tory leader Lord Salisbury. He felt that Gladstone and the Liberal anti-imperialists had dishonored themselves when they abandoned the Sudan after Gordon's death. (The Sudan was retaken under Salisbury.)

Kitchener was an imperialist who believed that the expansion of British power was also the expansion of civilization. He had seen firsthand the corruption of native officials and the routine cruelty of backward cultures. Before the British arrived, the principal product of the Sudan had been slaves. The idea of returning such areas to "self-government" was immoral. Referring to men like Kitchener, Warner observes, "They did not consider whether they had a God-given right to rule territories occupied by alien people; they merely consid-

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ered that it was best for all that they should do so." The dismal record of so many of the colonies since "independence" speaks volumes on this point.

Kitchener was made a viscount and was voted 50,000 pounds for his South African service. Now quite wealthy, he dabbled in investments in trade with Japan, railroad building in Russia, and a plantation in Kenya, but business was of little interest to him. With the rank of field marshal, he went on to India as commander in chief of the Indian Army where he introduced major reforms. He reorganized the Indian Army from scattered garrisons into nine divisions of three brigades each (one British, two Indian). "He saw the task of the Indian Army not as acting as a safeguard against another mutiny but as a means of defending the country . . . and, if the need arose, of supplying units for tasks overseas." The need arose with World War I. Four Indian divisions were rushed to France, two more went to Egypt where they stopped a Turkish invasion, and two protected the oil fields in Mesopotamia.

Kitchener quarreled with Lord Curzon, the viceroy, over the authority of the viceroy's military department (headed by an officer of inferior rank) to overrule the commander in chief. Curzon resigned in 1905, but the Liberal government under Asquith refused to appoint Kitchener viceroy. Kitchener instead returned to Egypt as consul general.

His record as a military reformer and battlefield victor made him the obvious choice in 1914 as secretary of state for war. He understood the nature of the war and contrary to the optimism of others argued that the war would last at least three years. The war would not be won by the first million troops England sent into battle but by the *last* million which could be raised. Firepower was the key, and Kitchener emphasized the need for industrial mobilization. He was disgusted by the fact that while men were dying at the front, factories could still be closed by strikers demanding higher pay.

The field marshal was appalled by the lack of military preparedness, blaming not only the politicians but the general staff for neglecting its duty to press the government for more funds. Germany could put three million men in the field with substantial reserves. Excluding colonial forces, England had fewer than 250,000 regulars and 450,000 territorials (who were not obligated to serve overseas). The continental armies were conscript, while England still relied on volunteers. Kitchener had favored conscription before the war but now opted for a recruiting campaign more in step with British tradition (England did not go to the draft until 1916). The response was overwhelming with two and a half million men rushing to the colors.

In the post-Vietnam era it is hard to picture a society in which those who did *not* enlist were harassed in the streets and sent white feathers by their girlfriends. The poster in which Kitchener sternly stares out and points his finger at the viewer with the caption "Your Country Needs You" became the model for the classic "Uncle Sam Wants You" poster adopted in the United States. (Kitchener's stern look was the result of eye and facial nerve damage sustained from a march through a sandstorm.) Warner includes copies of other posters used to attract enlistment which stress the integral nature of loyalty and duty within society. One urges "the young women of London" to ask their boyfriends to enlist because "If your young man neglects his duty to his King and Country, the time may come when he will *neglect you*."

Warner laments in his introduction that "Dying for one's country has a diminished appeal in the late twentieth century."

> In fact, the whole idea of patriotism has become suspect in many European countries. In Britain there seems to be a widespread credo that to be proud of one's homeland and heritage is wrong. The ideas and beliefs of immigrant peoples must be given equal place to the ones traditionally associated with this country. In consequence, Kitchener's statement that "your country needs you" has been rendered almost meaningless.

In our time the grand and wealthy civilization of the West trembles before the barbarians of the East and South.

Trench warfare ground up the new divisions in France. Kitchener's reputation as the Empire's greatest general was damaged as the casualties mounted. Sir John French's attack at Loos and Winston Churchill's expedition to the Dardanelles were not conceived by Kitchener, but he was won to their support despite fears England did not yet have the strength to see them through. Thus he shared the blame when they failed. Warner argues, however, that both plans came close to success, laying the blame on their tactical execution rather than their strategic conception.

Kitchener's time was taken up more by diplomatic and production problems than with the kind of military duties which had made his reputation. Warner argues that he "virtually assumed the role of wartime Prime Minister" in part because the Liberal leaders, Asquith and Lloyd-George, were too busy chasing women (in the latter case "with all the discrimination of an amorous rabbit"). It was on a mission to Russia to see what could be done to prop up the eastern front that Kitchener was killed when the cruiser *Hampshire*, on which he was traveling, struck a mine and sank. Warner speculates that Kitchener "*might* have prevented the disasters in Russia which led to the revolution," but that seems to be carrying matters too far.

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On the Road Again *by Janet Scott Barlow*

"We would rather run ourselves down than not to speak of ourselves at all."

—La Rochefoucauld

Salvation for Sale: An Insider's View of Pat Robertson's Ministry **by Gerard Thomas Straub, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.**

It is a signal of things to come that Gerard Thomas Straub opens his book *Salvation for Sale: An Insider's View of Pat Robertson's Ministry* with a list of quotations that begins with Miguel de Unamuno and winds up with Woody Allen. It is a *big* signal that the middle of the list (which precedes a Preface that is followed by a Prologue—will this book never start?) holds a shiny offering from Kahlil Gibran.

This resolutely eclectic collection is our first peek into the knapsack of a spiritual wanderer. And through the course of this book he will return time and again to his goody bag, there to find the extracted thoughts of, among many others, Rollo May, Thomas Jefferson, W.C. Fields, Thoreau, Gandhi, and "the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche." These are Mr. Straub's souvenirs from a "lifelong spiritual odyssey," a quest for Truth that has taken him from a "guilt-ridden" Roman Catholic boyhood to "a humanistic philosophy" to an exploration of "Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism" to his current spiritual resting place.

He begins this journey of "torment, prayer and pain" by calling out, "Who was I?" Beats me. Three hundred pages later he asks, "What am I?" and we resist the temptation to tell him. Never mind. He'll tell us. He is not a believer in "God"; he is a believer in "the probable existence of God and the absolute importance of searching for my own personal truth." He believes "man is a mystery in the midst of a mystery"; that God is a spot on a treasure map and "the spot is everywhere and nowhere"; that "to listen to and evaluate all the various pieces of advice offered by a diversified multitude would lead to a decision that might be founded in wisdom"; that "confusion and doubt are natural"; that we should all "say it with silence" (and oh, that the author had looked harder at that last little trinket). In other words, Mr. Straub's beliefs are a grab bag of Eastern mysticism, secular humanism, and Shirley MacLaine-ism. Sort of an offshoot of The Universe Is So Universal-ism.

Periodically Mr. Straub pulls his head from his knapsack long enough to debate himself on the *real* definition of sin, the *real* significance of the Bible, and the *real* "role God wants to play." He also takes time to explain the meaning of "authentic Christianity" and the reason so few Christians grasp it. Coming from a man who has replaced basic Christian doctrine with the idea that God the spot is everywhere and nowhere, this is like being lectured by a vegetarian on the proper way to grill a steak. The first question here is, What's it to you? Since the nature of the author's thinking precisely matches his idea of God, it's hard to tell. But it has something to do with a meat eater named Pat Robertson.

On the road to becoming a mystery

Janet Scott Barlow covers popular culture from her home in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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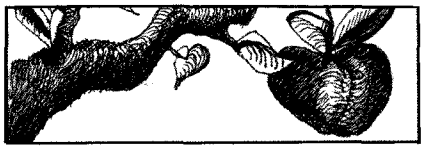
in the midst of a mystery, Gerard Straub made a pit stop at Pentecostal Fundamentalism, from which he has fashioned this "exposé of Christian television." Feeling "a responsibility to share with the public the dangers . . . in the electronic church," he moves first to expose the "born-again phenomenon" to an "unsuspecting" America. These revelations are worth going into because in addition to being the big come-on for this book, they provide the only laugh break on a very long trip.

Mr. Straub, who spent two and a half years in Pat Robertson's ministry as a born-again producer of *The 700 Club*, was "stunned" repeatedly during that time by his discovery of the following facts. Hold on to your hat. Ignoring all opportunities for "critical examination," Pentecostals believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and a literal interpretation of Scripture. They believe "they are in direct contact with the Almighty" and have a personal relationship with Jesus. They believe Hell is a real place and that all unsaved souls end up there, "even if they are devout Jews [or] Muslims." What's more, they "disregard" Gandhi's "tremendous respect for Jesus" and consign him to Hell too. They believe in salvation by grace, divine healing, speaking in tongues, and the power of prayer. They believe also in the Second Coming and the events surrounding it (about which the author says: "This was all news to me"). They spend much time, effort, and money —often through the medium of television—trying to convince others to believe as they do. This makes them a "secret kingdom." Finally, along about 1984, well after leaving the "fortress of fundamentalism," Mr. Straub "could not help but notice" that evangelical Christians had become "extremely political."

Humdingers all, especially that last one, a discovery whose timing suggests that Mr. Straub spent at least one leg of his spiritual odyssey in a cave somewhere.

As for the promise of "shocking anecdotes" about Pat Robertson's ministry, that promise is as rich as the author's account of the born-again phenomenon. Ready? Pat Robertson believes what he says he believes, totally. So do the people around him. He employs on his audiences "all kinds of oratorical tricks to bring [his] message alive," including the ability "to exhort, rebuke, threaten, cajole, and entice," as well as the "persuasive and moving power of frightening . . . metaphors, parables, allegories, [and] paradoxes." (Could this be what's known as *preaching*?) He asks for money from viewers, who voluntarily send him a lot of it. He once offered a spontaneous, sincere, and apparently effective prayer for the healing of a man in his studio audience, but never revealed that the man died soon after. He is a blunt and demanding boss.

There's more. Some salvation and healing testimonies that come into Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network are later filmed by CBN



crews who have no interest in functioning as "investigative reporters" or "a team of skeptics." While in Jerusalem, CBN staffers left Christian tracts on the pavement, in the hope that they would be seen by Orthodox Jews. Twenty-four employees were once fired for economy reasons. No one at the Christian Broadcasting Network ever wanted to discuss the teachings of Gandhi with Mr. Straub.

Last, apparently on the unheard-of principle that the man in charge gets to call the shots, Pat Robertson has strict rules against smoking, drinking, and extramarital sex, rules that were accepted by all employees and broken by some employees, including the author, who was observed breaking the second rule, caught lying about the third rule, and summarily canned. He claims to have been followed before the firing and to have been told by "the vice president" (no names are ever given) that his office phone was tapped. These are unattractive facts, if true, but in any case, they did not prompt a flood of indignation from Mr. Straub. He was sorry for the affair, sorry for the lie, and "devastated" by his "forced exodus" from a job he "loved" among "the nicest people with whom [he] had ever worked." (A large portion of the book is devoted to this affair, and to the author's failed marriage, and to his explanation that both are connected somehow to his "parents' sexually repressive attitudes" toward what he calls his youthful "arousement," and then there's something about life being "like wearing a Halloween mask in June," and take

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction by Margaret Kirkham, New York: Methuen; $10.95. Written, edited, reviewed by women, about a woman, for women, this book gives literate men a good opportunity for surveillance.

The Creative Process, edited by Brewster Chiselin, Los Angeles: University of California Press; $8.95. "We *know* so much, we feel so little," wrote D.H. Lawrence in a piece chosen by the editor of this anthology to illustrate the wonders of creativity. Though "we *know of* so much . . . " would have been more apt to explain why such books are compiled at all, Yeats, Einstein, Henry James, Kipling, *et al.* conspire to make delightful reading, Brewster Chiselin notwithstanding.

Reader in a Strange Land: The Activity of Reading Literary Utopias by Peter Rupert, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press; $19.00. To hope or to daydream may be the dichotomy posed by this well-researched and well-annotated look into the mechanics and the motives of human search for painlessness.

Talking Back to the Media by Peter Hannaford, New York: Facts on File Publications; $17.95. Or "What to do when Mike Wallace calls?" is an instructive manual on public survival, by an insider. Peter Hannaford, a two-time media adviser to President Reagan, has put his money where his mouth is: At the present, he is the president and owner of his own PR company, in Washington, DC.

Unending Blues by Charles Simic, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; $14.95. There must be something in the nature of poetry, especially in his native Yugoslavia, that has made Charles Simic decide upon the mournful mode. Yet, whereas Serbs have good cause to think of soul as an outcome of suffering, in Simic's case one suspects a mannerism. Adequately sung, Simic's fat, lame, and poor heroes people a landscape perversely intent on denying them tragedy.

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my word, more than that you don't want to know.)

His "investigation" complete, his case airtight—and being, by the way, one who has made every effort at "understanding and appreciating other faiths," one whose "nature much prefer[s] gentleness" and whose "tireless tolerance" extends all the way from smokers ("we should be tolerant and understanding of the smoker") to pornographers ("at worst, they are people who don't know any better")—Mr. Straub proceeds to label Pat Robertson, directly or by association, a "ruthless con artist," a "scoundrel," and a "bigot," as well as "a threat to all free-thinking, freedom-loving Americans who respect the dignity of humanity and who desire to live in peace and harmony with each other and the world." Somewhere along the way, the word "madness" is thrown in. And he's not finished yet. Twice he compares Robertson's beliefs and methods to those of Adolph Hitler. And with the entrance of Hitler comes the second question about Mr. Straub: Is the inability to make sense of any kind an excuse for a comparison that is, from several perspectives, despicable? (It doesn't seem to matter much that the answer is no, since "Hitler" is invariably the last belch of every sloppy mind on a moral toot.)

What, exactly, is this man's problem? As near as I can figure it, he has two. First, there is Pat Robertson's "hidden agenda," which Mr. Straub wants revealed to the public, right now: Pat Robertson is thinking of running for President. This upsets Mr. Straub because Robertson's insistence on embracing one religion at a time makes him "a threat to all free-thinking, freedom-loving, etc., etc." Mr. Straub never really explains *why* this poses such a threat (unless you count the fact that the religion being embraced is Fundamentalism); he simply repeats his assertion that "God is not a member of any political party," becoming a little more hysterical each time.

But then, during yet another private debate on the definition of sin (conclusion: *sin* "is a religious term"), an odd thing happens. In a totally unaccountable burst of insight, the author stamps his foot and pipes, "God gave us free will, and Pat Robertson and the religious right cannot take it away from us." If Mr. Straub were less committed to the belief that confusion is natural, he might be able to see that free will travels right into the voting booth, where Americans—a "diversified multitude" of them—demonstrate a time-tested willingness to enlighten Presidential candidates who fail to appreciate their diversity (*or* their commonality).

The second of Mr. Straub's problems—and this would seem to contradict his claim of free will, but what else is new?—is his certainty that none of us, not one, "is immune to the lure of the hucksters of holiness . . . that dominate religious television." They could "hook anybody," he tells us—"a movie star, a college professor, a corporate executive." And if these folks could hook "a transcendental meditation teacher," if they could hook "even an astronaut," if they could hook—and here's the important part—a man familiar with both Kahlil Gibran and Woody Allen, then it's for sure that every "poorly trained spiritual conscience," every "naive yet well-intentioned" viewer, every "poor soul" and "common man" is done for. His patronizing concern for the capacity of what he calls "the masses" to think for themselves raises the third and final question about Mr. Straub: Aren't guys like this a pain?

In his Postscript (which follows an Epilogue—will this book never end?), the author, one last time, displays a Thought, this one his own: "The ability to constantly question has two enemies: the desire for constancy and the holding of convictions." What do you know—the man's finally on to something. "Next year," he continues, "I hope that I'm not as ignorant as I was this year." (And I, for one, have my fingers crossed.) Then, bringing his Thought full circle, he concludes, "[C]onsistency requires that I be just as ignorant." Perhaps I'll just say it with silence.

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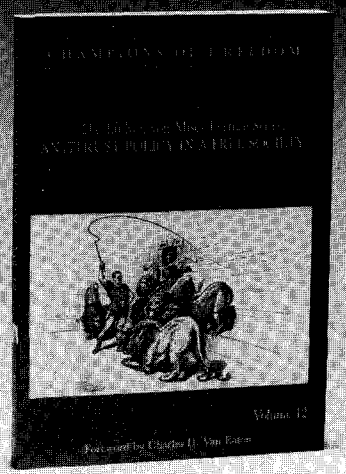

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Martyrs Inc.

Of Prisons and Ideas **by Milovan Djilas, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; $17.95.**

"When I must define my own views," writes Milovan Djilas in his latest book, *Of Prisons and Ideas*, "I identify them as 'democratic socialist.'" For those who find this oxymoronic, Djilas' whole book may seem like an exercise in contortion.

True to his earlier autobiographical works, Djilas clings to the purity and the intensity of his motives as proofs of his virtue. Long pages on the "idea" (a concept possibly meaningful in dialectical materialism) are used to illustrate the proposition that there is no evil but that of self-doubt. If Djilas has ever experienced any, it is hard to detect it in his autobiographies, or even in his other books.

Aside from its literary shortcomings (repetition, inanity, and sloppiness), *Of Prisons and Ideas* is Djilas' weakest book, because it is a triumph of his desire to be remembered as a philosopher. Whatever else he may be, Djilas falls far short of qualifying as a serious thinker—a writer who perceives both Plato and Marx as "the most eminent representatives of the two tendencies" (i.e., "idealist" and "materialist" philosophies) commands little respect, despite all his sincerity and suffering.

That Djilas has suffered, much, cannot be questioned, though he would be the last to let anyone forget it. Throughout *Of Prisons and Ideas* he concretizes his experiences into an absolute truth. His numerous references to the beatings he underwent may seem like an insult to those whose spirit has been broken by torments he was never privy to. It does sound uplifting to learn that nothing can break a righteous man, but there is much information coming from other sources that indicates otherwise.

A man whose profoundly religious nature has been thwarted by the quirks of his being, Djilas strives mightily to create a rational, humanist religion. Though it is true that prison is a paradigm and that man is of supreme importance to himself, Djilas' hubris will not allow him to see himself for what he is: a warrior hooked on righteousness.

In Yugoslavia, Djilas has been and still is hated much, both by his former comrades and by his enemies in the Civil War. Yet, for a man as avowedly introspective as Djilas, with such a record of personal violence, the self-satisfaction he displays in his autobiographies is circumspect, to say the least.

To a Western conservative, Djilas has very little to offer: spiritually, existentially, or philosophically. As a quintessential politician, he cannot let go of socialism, the only reality he can contemplate for Yugoslavia. As a pow-

REVISIONS

Deathland

Invisibility is a curse that may tax any man, but for a region to "disappear" calls for wholesale murder. The smothered scream of the Bulgars, neither Greek nor Russian, Turk nor wholly Slav, has moved one American to write a gasping novel and name it *The Corpse Dream of N. Petkov* (Elmwood Park, IL: The Dalkey Archive Press; $20.00). Thomas McGonigle, an Irishman once married to a Bulgarian, sets his sorrow to words, in the best tradition of a Balkan tale.

Whether *The Corpse Dream of N. Petkov* tells more about McGonigle or martyred Nikola Petkov, the leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party executed by Bulgarian Communists in 1947, is hard to say. The prose, carved into mind-prodding chunks, speaks of a Bulgaria that is loved as much as any foreigner can manage. Was "he showing character" or was "he just stupid" asks McGonigle of himself, as well as of the hanged hero of his book.

Is there life in Bulgaria, or, for that matter, anywhere north of the Pindus and south of the Alps? Why did the Turkic horsemen, the Bulgars, come into Thrace, to confound the Byzantines, and later the Serbs, the Vlachs, the Magyars, and the readers of Thomas McGonigle's novel? Why did they leave the well-defined Volga, still bearing their name, and mix with subjugated Slavs to cause Friedrich Engels to remark that the whole of Balkans was nothing but an "ethnological dung-heap"? As it is, Engels' words were conveniently forgotten by the most forgotten tyrants of all: the Bulgarian Communists. Exhumed only by attempts against the life of a Polish Pope, or by short notices in British newspapers, of lethal umbrella tips used to murder Bulgarian émigrés, Bulgars dream on, sunk in the soil of Thrace beyond their furthest reach.

McGonigle's apparent personal obsession with death, his own probably more than his hero's, is set against a backdrop of the Western powers' indifference: In a nugget, we are treated to the spectacle of great U.S. experts, Dean Acheson and George F. Kennan, preventing an American diplomat from intervening in N. Petkov's behalf. What may have clouded the minds of these *illuminati* may not be too hard to reconstruct, given today's headlines. The same people who gave us Peace in Our Time, from 1917 until the present, had none of McGonigle's sensibility to suffering not exclusively their own.

The Bulgars grope—hands towards the West, spurned kisses to the East. The Volga is no longer their river, nor is it the Maritsa. "When Russians break wind," goes a Balkan joke, "the Bulgarians soil themselves." Mehmed Ali Agca, a grinning Turk, may have done more to exculpate them lately than any of their lords and protectors.

McGonigle has both a heart and a mind, and we can expect him to get over Nikola Petkov's death, like all decent people. If life is but a chance, death, even McGonigle's, is but a cancellation. The brevity of our life means little compared to the duration of our shame—there is time enough, maybe more than most of us can account for.

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ermonger, he has nothing to teach those who are not concerned with vanquishing, as opposed to mere winning.

Yugoslavia does not need a new charismatic champion of merciless betterment. The West does not need another false martyr and an even falser prophet, leading us all into our "limitless future." If there is anything limitless about man it may be our gullibility —our optimism must not be the outcome of either our ignorance or our cowardice but of our knowledge of self and our essentially "limited" humanity.

It is true that Communists, Djilas included, have often exhibited a most exemplary idealism and transcendence of human frailty, but Djilas hides the wellsprings of this attainment. Today, as before, fanatics' endurance is based on expectation of reward, ever greater than any evil committed for the cause. That may be found surprising in a Montenegrin, to whom a Valhalla should provide ample solace.

A battle well fought, a game elegantly played to the utmost, a manliness paid full homage to may have satisfied true men through the ages, yet for Djilas and his innumerable likes, this was never enough —especially compared to full dominion over the Earthly, or the Heavenly Kingdom. (MS)

Out of the Closet, Into the Morgue

by Bryce Christensen

The AIDS Cover-Up? The Real and Alarming Facts About AIDS by Gene Antonio, San Francisco: Ignatius; $9.95.

Homosexual activists will not like this book. For if ever there were an empirical refutation to the "gay rights" agenda, Gene Antonio has written it. In convincing (sometimes nauseating) detail, Antonio explains why the homosexual movement has provided the ideal conduit for one of the most lethal diseases ever to afflict mankind. Yet homosexuals and their apologists have so far managed to suppress public debate of the most disturbing discoveries about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Not many people know that the homosexual ghetto was already a contagion-ridden swamp *before* the AIDS epidemic. Fewer still have heard that the AIDS virus belongs to the class of killer pathogens known as lentiviruses, previously found only in monkeys, sheep, and pigs and so far entirely resistant to veterinary cure. Most people remain unaware of research showing that the AIDS virus can kill even if the body's immune system remains intact. Likewise hidden from public view are studies suggesting that the disease might be spread through mosquito bites, milk contamination, and casual contact.

Several of Antonio's recommendations for fighting the disease —broadening the official definition of AIDS, closing bathhouses, banning homosexual blood donations, and legally restricting other homosexual activities—make sense, except that he wants the *Federal* government to take these steps. The Feds do not need another excuse to tighten their bureaucratic stranglehold on America. Given

"The best case of a periodical which stretches across the arts"

—The London Times Literary Supplement

Spring 1987 issue features Wendell Berry's essay "Writer and Region: Dumb Abyss and Beloved Community," about rootlessness versus community in American life and literature. And John P. Sisk's essay "The Devil and American Epic" deals with writings about war from *The Red Badge of Courage* to *M.A.S.H.*

Also, A. R. Ammons' twelve-page poem "Inclinations"; "Flood", a story by Kathleen Hill; Nikki Stiller looks at Jim Jarmusch's film "Down by Law"; and other chronicles of recent film, music, dance and theatre.

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some freedom to act, most local communities could move quite effectively against AIDS. Those few cities not strong enough to overrule the homosexual lobby could be turned into enormous public cemeteries, memorials to perversion as an alternative death-style.

Talk to Me

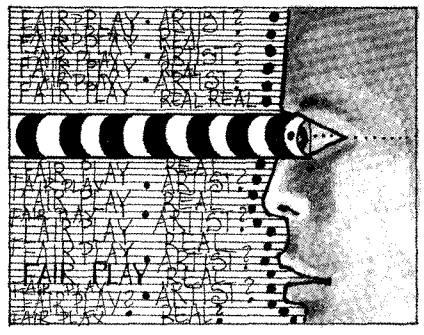
by Frederick Butzen

The Silicon Society **by David Lyon, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; $14.95.**

The last 20 years have seen the proliferation of a machine that stores, organizes, and retrieves information: the computer. It can perform repetitive tasks without error or fatigue, analyze problems too complex for the human brain, and collate great quantities of information. The power of the computer, however, has its drawbacks —among other things, it allows governments to monitor in detail the activities of citizens, and it takes employment from those who cannot perform other kinds of work.

Ours are the times of a romance with the computer. Computers are continually described as being "powerful," "fast," and "smart"; they "work" for us; they are "friendly" and can "help" us. We sophisticates of the 1980's no longer anthropomorphize the things of nature; instead, we humanize our machines. As a result, computers are accepted uncritically; many consider them an unalloyed good, or at least the "wave of the future." The tremendous amounts of money involved only strengthen this attitude.

In *The Silicon Society*, David Lyon examines the computer and its effects on us from a Christian perspective. Dr. Lyon is senior lecturer in social analysis at Bradford and Ilkey College, England, and his book is based on the 1985 London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity. Despite my wish to recommend this book, however, *The Silicon Society* is a disappointment. It is superficial, for Dr. Lyon simply doesn't know very much about the subject on which he is writing. The text is anecdotal and has a number of



factual errors, while the bibliography merely reiterates the usual E.F. Schumacher, Alvin Toffler, *et al.* Throughout *The Silicon Society* the author tantalizes us with intriguing but undeveloped topics. For example, Dr. Lyon at one point comments that "no Christian teaching demands we rule out in advance the possibility that humans could create thinking machines," an assertion worthy of a book by itself.

Dr. Lyon, however, makes two points worth emphasizing: First, no discipline can generate the principles to judge itself; second, a Christian must consider how the tenets of Christianity apply to the discipline in question. A Christian is obliged to use it in a way that does not gratuitously harm his fellow men. The assertion of scientism, that technology will somehow rescue us from the problems created by itself, is unsubstantiated. Our use of the devices must be principled and thought through.

Computer worshipers claim that we stand on the verge of an Age of Information. In my experience, however, the future promises to be the Age of Misinformation—nothing rivals the computer in churning out masses of statistically analyzed, thoroughly collated, beautifully printed nonsense. The sheer quantity of information threatens to be overwhelming: the Harvard five-foot shelf of the future may hold not a few printed classics, but the entire Library of Congress on compact disks. As never before, we need skills of the mind, what Dorothy Sayers called "the lost tools of learning." More than the myriad governmental programs that Dr. Lyon advocates, more than the technical training that the computer lovers advocate, an education emphasizing reading, writing, reasoning, and religion would best equip our young people for the use of the computer.

Frederick Butzen is a technical writer for a publisher of computer languages and operating systems.

A Strange Career

by Buddy Matthews

Thinking Back **by C. Vann Woodward, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press; $12.95.**

C. Vann Woodward, Sterling Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University and a contributing editor to *The New Republic*, is the leading liberal historian of the South. For three decades his encyclopedic knowledge and detailed historical investigations have produced works that have set the pattern for subsequent historians.

Woodward accepts the title "liberal," if somewhat reluctantly:

> In the years of struggle over race relations, starting long before the Civil Rights Movement got underway and continuing through its course, the term *liberal* was all but unavoidable for someone with my views. Admitting a wide span of differences among those who wore it, the identification was clear enough for the issue at hand and could be worn with honor. I am not about to disavow it in that connection. . . . Worn by a Southerner, however, the identification drew one into

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some strange company and implied a heritage that I could never reconcile with my own views of past or present.

Thinking Back is a reflection on each of his published books. Since Woodward has so often given novel interpretations to Southern history, he has been the subject of a great deal of professional criticism. That criticism plays a major role in his new book, in which he acknowledges that "the subjects I chose to write about have usually been of a controversial nature," and concedes, "Criticism is the life of the trade in historical ideas and at least half the fun."

One brief passage in *Thinking Back* may give an insight into Woodward's revisionist mind. It has to do with his being offended at the term "Sunbelt" applied to his native South:

> To begin with meteorological foundations, the South enjoys more inches of rainfall per year than any other region in the country. The more precipitation, the more clouds and the less sun. It could more appropriately be dubbed the Cloudbelt.

I have no idea why Woodward finds this argument convincing. Anyone who has spent a summer in the South knows perfectly well why it is called the Sunbelt. But it does give some insight into his revisionist thinking. Having looked back over his published work, one gets the impression that the professor must lie awake at night trying to figure out what commonplace notion he can challenge next.

It is generally conceded that Professor Woodward's most important book is *Origins of the New South* (also published by LSU Press), which covers the history of the South from 1877 to 1913; however, his book which had the greatest impact was *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. This little book had its origin in a series of lectures at the University of Virginia in the year 1954, following hard on the heels of *Brown* v. *Board of Education*. Woodward acknowledges that this book probably had a wider reading than all the rest of his books put together.

The book contended that racial segregation, as a legal requirement, was not always part of the South, as many have thought. In fact, Jim Crow only emerged in the late 1800's and became thoroughly entrenched in the early part of the 20th century. A casual reader might take away the impression that there was some degree of harmonious racial cohabitation between whites and blacks before, say, 1890. In the 1950's, neither advocates nor detractors of the civil rights movement could avoid realizing the implications. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* helped to earn Professor Woodward the title of a historical "presentist," or a man who writes history with a purpose.

Woodward denies the charge and sees himself as a traditional historian. In fact, he has generally avoided quantitative history or psycho-history. The bulk of his work has consisted of digging into archives, newspapers, and documents of the past. Indeed it was this digging that brought him to the conclusion that the notion of the solid, unified South of the post-Civil War era was largely a myth.

Woodward's book may not be for everyone. For those interested in history and American historiography, it is an important work and, as Woodward recognizes, unique. It exhibits the vitality that has been characteristic of his writing, and it offers needed insights into his career and thinking.

Why write a book for such a selective audience? Perhaps the book is ultimately a statement of faith. Many of the historical subjects Woodward has examined in his career, Tom Watson, Lewis H. Blair, and George Fitzhugh, all had one common trait: In their last years they renounced the cause they had stood for all their lives. Tom Watson, for instance, had been a progressive-minded leader of the Populist movement from the 1880's on. A defender of racial equality early in life, he became, in the end, a strident racist.

At 78, Woodward may be trying to tell us that he has not reneged, he has stayed the course. A liberal he was, and a liberal he remains. Of course liberalism implies more than racial tolerance (otherwise most conservatives would be liberals), but that is a question he never addresses.

Buddy Matthews is a journalist based in Dallas.

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Letter From Bedlam

by R.E. Lieb

Smile When You Say 'Psychiatrist'

I did not mean to harm anyone when I bought a Bachelor of Arts degree in Child Psychology for $100. I meant it to be a bitter joke on myself. I was going to hang it up in my room, much as an important man might hang a *Playboy* cartoon on a wall in his home.

I had had a very unhappy childhood. Along its tortuous course, I fell in love, at 10 or 11, with a picture of Cinderella in a schoolbook. (A classmate drew a Stalin mustache across her face, and I hated him for many years.) At 14, in an institution for orphaned and unwanted children, I saw Cinderella again: golden-haired, green-eyed, slender, about 15. Live this time. The "home" was a tough place where boys fought over slices of bread. Boys and girls were kept strictly separated, in different buildings. But we found means to communicate. She took a sweater of hers apart to knit socks and mittens for me for Christmas and saved almost all her Christmas candies to give me on my birthday in February. But then she was moved to another place, and so was I; and of course we were not permitted to communicate any longer.

When I was 15, I was interviewed by a social worker. Plans had to be made for my future. What did I want to become? I understood well what I needed: a sense of identity, stability, a sense of belonging. Privacy. And I wanted to be my own boss. I told her, "I want to be a farmer." I had visions of apple trees and of a frog pond, of quiet meadows and forested hills and cows and cats and a dog. But she laughed shrilly.

"A farmer? You are much too intelligent for that: You must become Something Better!" But I could not think of anything that I wanted more.

I ran away from an institution at 16 and became a drifter, working at all sorts of menial jobs. At 21, I was hired by a pulp mill in a place which seemed to me to be almost the far end of the world.

In that pulp mill town, I discovered another Cinderella. But she wanted to marry a college man who would take her away from that company town to a nice big city suburb. She was not very kind. After a while, I could see myself through her eyes: an ungainly, graceless fellow whose moderate habits made him even more dull, destined to work forever in mines and mills at the fringe of civilization, or else live in urban slums.

I happened to see an ad in a magazine: "Diplomas. Fast. Inexpensive." I wrote. I paid $100. I passed 12 "courses" in three months by rephrasing all the gibberish about cosmic rays and such stuff that they contained, and I received my diploma, a lovely diploma with some gilded letters and an embossed coat of arms and a red seal and bold signatures.

I was going to hang it on the wall to remind myself of all that I was not, but then the devil got into me. Within a few weeks I decided to move to a city and try to get a job in my new profession. I was sure that I would be unmasked as an impostor within two weeks. I hoped I would be brought before a judge. I was a nobody who wanted to be heard, even though he had really nothing to say. I wanted to make an angry speech. I dreamed of getting into the news, of being famous for a few hours.

I had saved a bit of money. I rented a room in the city and went to the book department of a large downtown department store and bought a copy of every paperback book with the word "psychology" in the title. There were about 20.

In the mornings, I walked a lot and took bus rides and explored the city. In the evenings, till well after midnight, I read my psychology books in an all-night restaurant. After a week, I was through and felt ready to look for a job.

I telephoned the director of one social agency. He said that he could not receive me for an interview till the middle of the next month. I took a taxi and confronted him in his office. He yelled at me, waved papers in my face. He told me his whole itinerary for the next three weeks. He was hurrying to catch a plane. No, he could not talk to me till about a month from then. "And what if I starved to death by then?" He apologized, slightly. He gave me the name and address of the director of a subordinate agency.

I spent a whole afternoon in a stuffy office with a short, bald, drowsy man who kept on piling papers from one side of his desk to the other. He spoke of positions for which he would like to hire me, queried me about whether I felt I could fill them efficiently, let me get all excited, and then said that unfortunately the position did not yet exist because the agency didn't have enough money. He played with me thus till closing time. Then he gave me the address of a director who was even lower on the feudal scale.

Mr. G. directed a boys' home in a rundown part of the city. It was housed in a narrow, solid, three-story building of gray stone which belonged to a religious order. He could exude a wonderful air of paternal benevolence when it suited him but was more often childish and arbitrary. I found out before too long that the institution had had *over 40 consecutive supervisors in about four years time.* None of them lasted longer than two months.

My salary was to be about one-third of what I had earned in the pulp mill;

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but the cook at the place earned more than what I had earned. Mr. G. and his family liked to eat well, to eat very well; and for that reason the fare given to the boys was extremely plain. I had to eat with the boys. As the sole supervisor, responsible for 34 juvenile delinquents aged from eight to 16, I was on duty around the clock, except on Wednesday (which I had off from noon till midnight), Saturday, and every second Sunday.

Mr. G. ate all the sweets that were donated to the institution. But baseball equipment had also been donated, and when the weather permitted it, the boys had to play baseball every evening and all day Saturday and Sunday afternoon—a bit much even for boys.

The boys not selected to a team had to study or go to bed. Mr. G. had also given me all sorts of other ludicrous instructions, among them that the boys could go to the bathroom only before meals and at bedtime. I was supposed to make sure that the boys in bed did not talk, that the boys in the basement room did, in fact, study, and that the boys in the yard kept on playing. When Mr. G. discovered a boy sneaking to the bathroom, he would smile benignly at the child and then come out and chastise me.

But I am stubborn. I stayed for six months, until Mr. G., who happened to be a Catholic, got into an argument with the priest of a nearby church about which one of them was more of a saint. The priest had the religious order cancel the lease on our building.

Not long after I started my job with Mr. G., I got a very pleasant telephone call from a psychologist employed by the agency under whose aegis the boys' home was operated. He invited me to lunch. We went to an Italian restaurant, where the waiters snickered at him behind his back. He was 30ish and balding. He told me that we young professionals must assert ourselves against the old fogies in the agency. He wanted me to spy on Mr. G. and report to him anything that was to his detriment, no matter how small.

I was not ready to do that. I asked Mr. G. about the psychologist and was told that that man had had a key to the institution and had been in the habit of letting himself in long after bedtime and sitting on the beds of boys till after midnight because children "relate better" at night. Mr. G. had the locks changed and refused to give the psychologist a key.

I worked for 12 years in jobs obtained on the basis of my alleged university education, and my competence was never questioned. I had one particularly good job with the municipal department of welfare and housing, but I left there after three years. Perhaps I wanted to be found out because I wanted to believe that a university education means more than the learning contained in 20 paperbacks. I felt compelled to expose myself to new job situations which might be too demanding for me.

In the Special Psychiatric Annex of the city's world-renowned children's hospital, I presumed that I would be really tested. At the same time, I was excited because I was told that the Special Psychiatric Annex was a sort of pinnacle in our profession, "one of the best of its kind in the world."

The place was four or five city blocks from the hospital proper. It was an elderly three-story brownstone house, ill kept, surrounded by weeds and bare ground (alternately, dust or mud), by nettles and unattractive shrubs and, on three sides, a high picket fence.

Thirteen boys and girls, between six and 15, were taken care of there by a staff of 44. We had a Psychiatrist-in-Charge, a Psychiatrist-Director, two to five other psychiatrists, two psychologists, a social worker, an Inservice Instructor, three nurses, two teachers, and 12 child-care workers, of which I was among the best paid.

After a while I realized that the children in the institution were really incidental, that their main function was to justify the salaries of the "highly qualified personnel." The psychiatrists and psychologists worked only during regular weekday working hours, when the children were at school. The two women teachers managed not only to cope with the children but also to instruct them. On the other hand, I saw three psychiatrists literally run from a child that was rolling on the floor in a temper tantrum.

Careers were not made with the children but at the daily meetings between 10:00 to 11:30 and 2:00 to 3:30. There, it was decidedly advisable

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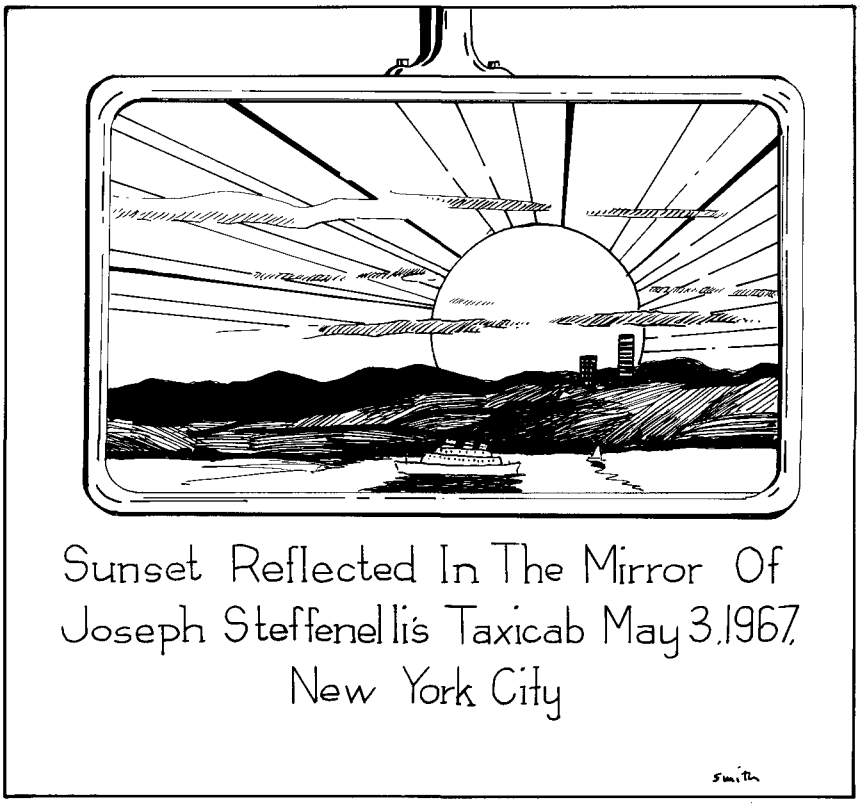

Sunset Reflected In The Mirror Of Joseph Steffenelli's Taxicab May 3,1967 New York City

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to question a lot *during the first hour* and indeed to disagree a bit with the psychiatrist, so that he could pretend he was an open-minded person. Anyone who remained silent got a message from him through the Charge Nurse: Perhaps Mr. X. did not have anything to contribute to the great work at the institution; perhaps Mr. X. would be happier somewhere else.

The fifth quarter-hour was the time to say to the psychiatrist, "Oh, *now* I understand"; and "I never thought about *that* aspect," which gave the psychiatrist the last quarter of an hour to sum up what *we* had learned.

And what did we learn? On weekends, assigned careworkers usually showed up late or not at all or drunk; there were occasions when I took care of all our charges. In the evenings, careworkers put their charges to bed as soon as possible and then rushed to the Staff Room to make personal phone calls and drink coffee and smoke and read and talk about how *sick sick sick* the children were—because if the children were *sick sick sick*, then the work of the "highly qualified personnel" was all that much more dramatic and important and wonderful.

I did not catch on quick enough. I thought that my job was to reconcile the children with a world which had often treated them badly, to teach them how to get along with people and have a good time. I was proud when I could write in the daily report: "Had a good day. Was cooperative and cheerful. Got along well with other children." Finally a psychiatrist snarled at me: "That is not the way to write reports"; but he didn't tell me how to write reports. I had to find out for myself.

Among the careworkers was a girl whom I will call Mallory. In the evenings and on weekends, she generally hid away from her charges, in the Staff Room, talked about her latest abortion, and made literally hour-long private phone calls, drank coffee, smoked. She was usually assigned to two boys, Joe and Tony. Tony was only six, but a clever and assertive fellow. He would knock on the Staff Room door: "Come out, Mallory, and do things with us, like you're supposed to." Mallory would get hysterical: "I hate that little f----n' bastard! Drop dead! Leave me alone!" She not only had a degree in psychology, she was also a psychiatric outpatient, at another hospital, for many years. She knew what psychology is all about. One evening, after a summer storm, she asked Tony: "Listen, Tony! Who is the big warm sun that makes the clouds in you go away?" She pressed and prompted him for a long time. Finally, she wrested from him a dubious "You?"

A few days later, at a meeting, the Psychiatrist-in-Charge read a 500-word romance purporting to be a report on how Tony had shyly confided to Mallory that "Something very important is happening here! Miss—— evidently has a special relationship with Tony!" Yes, indeed! Mallory had by that time phoned at least on 12 separate occasions, during weekends and evenings, to the main hospital complex, claiming that Tony was "unmanageable," and had a nurse come to give the boy an injection of sedatives. No other careworker did so.

Special relationships became a sort of in-house knighthood. One noon–time, when lunch was late, a boy whiled the time away by scratching dirt out of a crack in the table. His astute careworker asked: "Into whose heart are you sticking this knife?" He worked on that, and got *his* special relationship a few days later.

Tony got into many fights, mainly because Mallory neglected her charges. Joe and Tony wanted to join up with other groups and were rejected, and Tony would hit and shove. In a meeting, with all the psychiatrists *et al.*, it was deduced that Tony fought because an older boy in another group was instigating him. Neither the motivation of the older boy nor the mechanics of his instigating were even discussed. The P-in-C ordered that when Tony would fight thenceforth, his careworker was to find Kevin and sit on him.

Apparently nobody noticed that Mallory was very clumsy and, weighing close to 200 pounds, might well cause grievous harm to Kevin if she were to try to sit on him. I gasped: "You mean if I am with Tony and he fights in our dirty backyard, I leave him there and run downtown to Woolworth's and sit on Kevin there, if he's there?"

The psychiatrist did not deign to answer. But later I got the message: Perhaps I had nothing positive to contribute to the great work at the Institution. Perhaps I would be a lot happier somewhere else.

There was a file in the Staff Room on each child; we were supposed to read the files. But I didn't want to. I was afraid that if I read of disturbed behavior, I might expect it and subconsciously provoke it. I wanted to see the problems first. Actually, I never had any problems with the children, who all seemed to be astonishingly normal. Bob in particular. He was such a pleasant, sensible, reliable fellow that I went to his file in sheer perplexity. It contained three items: a statement by his mother that he had been conceived while his father was drunk and that she had known from the first that he would be retarded; second, a statement from a school principal that Bob had done a lot of daydreaming at school; last, an admission form on which it was stated that he had an I.Q. of below 80. There was nothing about any disturbed or delinquent behavior. There was no indication that he had been seen by a psychiatrist in the three years since his admission.

Worse: In the ensuing weeks and months I became convinced that Bob was actually quite intelligent. I asked to have his I.Q. tested again and was threatened with dismissal because only psychiatrists could make such requests. But the boy was retested. This time they came up with a 130/ Borderline Genius.

And then? Nothing happened. A report with the new figure was entered in the file after a few weeks. That was all. Bob was the perfect patient. He justified a lot of salaries without making any demands. They wanted to keep him.

An aquarium had been donated. Because Bob was the only one who took care of it, it was moved into his room and spoken of as Bob's aquarium. He wanted to buy more fish and an air pump. I told him that if he would save five dollars out of his allowance, I would pay the rest. He saved half of his allowance every week. And then we had a Case Conference on Bob.

"Saving is not normal in a boy. He will explode!" said careworker T.D.

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—who bragged about having left three girls pregnant, who admitted to being an alcoholic, and who expressed his leftist politics by taking his charges on stealing raids in stores. None of the psychiatrists questioned the notion that saving is abnormal and causes children to explode.

"And he doesn't relate!" said careworker M.R.—one must not blame her for being a lesbian and for having had "a crush" on Bob when he entered puberty. But she did turn the boy in because he would not allow her to kiss and fondle him.

"He is hard to handle," said careworker P.R.—a flabby, malodorous fellow who bragged about beating up "queers" and then when very drunk made a homosexual pass at me.

On the basis of the above, and nothing else, the Psychiatrist-in-Charge, in the presence of psychiatrists and psychologists, ordered that *Bob be immediately put on heavy sedation and that arrangements be made to have him transferred to a correctional institution!*

R.E. Lieb writes from Newfoundland.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Poker Lessons

(I didn't write this month's letter. My poker and fishing buddy Peter Donaldson did. Peter's an Irish Catholic boy from Brooklyn, but a fast learner. After he moved from North Carolina to Occupied Virginia, to take a job in DC, he sent back to the Chapel Hill Newspaper *some reflections on what he missed. I couldn't have said it better, or as well, myself. —JSR)*

I am a terrible poker player. I know exactly how bad I am because I once played with an empiricist—or finagler, depending on whether you think he was motivated by science or greed—who after each game calculated how much each of us won or lost. During the two years my friend collected data, I lost more than any of the seven regular players and had the longest losing streak. In my own defense, I should say that my two-year average combined a so-so year, during which I almost broke even, with a miserable year, during which I funded my friends' recreations.

I am a poor poker player because I think of poker as a relaxing diversion and an occasion for camaraderie. Better players understand the game as an exercise in discipline and a chance to outsmart one's neighbors.

The Chapel Hill poker game to which for eight years I devoted every other Thursday evening had a history of almost two decades, during which harsh words were exchanged only once. The limits of the game's goodwill startled visitors or new players. If, for example, a player accidentally discarded the wrong card and complained about it, the game stopped and an effort was made to find the incorrectly discarded card—if it was possible without giving the negligent player the advantage of looking at the other discarded hands.

The regular players were mostly university faculty, but they ran from new lecturers (some of whom became tenured over the years) to distinguished professors. Graduate students, a doctor, a lawyer, an insurance salesman, and an assortment of occasional players of varying skills and indeterminate occupations also played. One regular was an outspoken fan of the state's most conservative politicians and another worked for the liberals. A variety of religions were represented, of which the most popular seemed to be Some and None. The game always included at least one woman; several years ago, two women were regulars.

The custom was to play every game at the same house. We rarely changed locales and then only when necessary. Once we started a card game in a back room while our host was dining with guests in the front of his house. When the host was on sabbatical in Europe, we moved to another house. But when he returned home, so did the poker game. Only country music was permitted during the game despite people's taste for other sounds. Snacks were few: popcorn provided by the host if he was winning, and an occasional bag of chips provided by the previous game's big winner. People brought their own drinks, usually beer. We got fancier when longtime players moved away: pseudo-black-tie suppers were held to say farewell.

The game's only absolutes were good manners and willingness to sacrifice one's gain, if necessary, for the harmony of the group. Some of those who sat in from time to time found the game's steadfast fellowship amusing; others thought it was frustrating. The object of poker, after all, is winning the most money. The *New York Times* recently ran an article by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Mamet, in which he concluded that winning at poker "means not giving your fellow players a break because you value their feelings." Mamet would not have lasted in our game.

Once, one of the Southerners in the game illustrated the South's special character by noting that Southerners prefer "Where are you from?" to "What do you do?" as a conversational ice-breaker. He argued—and I never met a Southerner who disagreed with him—that avoiding an emphasis on what one does is based on the belief that what you do is a paltry way to indicate who you are. Some of us are winners and others are not. Southerners mix denial and sociability as a means of coping with the inequalities of life. As with life, so with poker.

A year ago, I moved to Washington, DC. What strikes me most in my new home is how much this once-Southern city could use an infusion of the culture and manners characteristic of my old poker game. Most Washingtonians revel in precisely the sort of differences among people that my poker-playing friends avoided. The *Washington Post*, for example, gleefully profiles what it refers to as "high-powered, dual-Washington-insider-career marriages." People have to deal not only with what they do, but with what their spouses do. Even the city's charity is delivered in ways that highlight the differences between the haves and the have-nots. Last winter, a toney caterer was contracted to provide tuxedoed waiters and finger foods at a reception for the homeless, conveniently dovetailed into a made-for-TV movie about life on the street.

Although I didn't take the poker games very seriously, I miss them dearly. The time and distance away have made it clear that there were

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lessons to be learned at the poker table. A friend, who claims to be quoting Mark Twain, says that the two best things in life are playing poker and winning, and playing poker and losing. In North Carolina, the emphasis was on playing poker; in Washington, it's on winning and losing.

Peter J. Donaldson is on the staff of the National Academy of Sciences, but isn't defined by what he does.

Letter From Toronto

by James L. Sauer

A Chesterton Adventure, Protestantly Considered

The last speaker ended at 10:30, Saturday night. I was at St. Michael's College in Toronto for the 50th Anniversary Conference, commemorating G.K. Chesterton's death. A memorial Mass was scheduled for the morning with Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter; but as a Biblical and Reformed Christian (that's evangelicalspeak for Protestant), I thought I might leave without disturbance. No loss of acquired merit; no penalty for renouncing this task of supererogation. We separated brethren are given a special dispensation, I think. Check it out in Vatican II. In any case, I had left my wife and three children back in Buffalo with my parents and wanted to get back to them. I still had a two-hour trip ahead of me. Like a true Hobbit, I longed for home, even the surrogate home of a kinsman. I had had my adventure: a trip to Canada. I was there; and now, like Bilbo Baggins, it was time to go back again.

I strolled to my car, a 1972 AMC Matador station wagon. Owning an old car is an act of faith; the triumph of hope over reason. I have long held that the automobile was not a recent invention, as many imagine, but was actually given to mankind at the time of the Fall. It is part of our curse to be saddled with these motorized carts until Christ returns, in order that we might learn patience. Suffering, after all, produces patience, and cars certainly make us suffer.

My intuitive theology proved correct. My car wouldn't start. The Adamic curse was still in full effect. An electrically arcing solenoid barred my path like an angel with a flaming sword. I was not allowed to travel home. I made my way back to the conference hall for help. Jeff and Laurie Carson, a Canadian couple whom I had befriended, helped me jump the battery and wiggle the finicky solenoid, but the engine just wouldn't kick over.

As I pondered my predicament—a broken car, a stranger in a strange land, with $40 in my pocket—I remembered one of my favorite G.K. Chesterton quotes: "An inconvenience rightly considered, is an adventure." Now was the time for putting this wisdom to good use. One could either stand around lamenting one's helpless state or just enjoy it. I chose the latter. Chesterton would have been proud of me.

Providentially, as we Evangelical Calvinist types are known to refer to fortuitous events, a tow truck appeared out of nowhere. My Canadian couple went on their way.

One of the unusual things about the conference had been the number of non-Catholics in attendance. I met an Orthodox professor and a Pentecostal minister. There were a number of Anglicans whom I met as well. Two Evangelicals addressed the conference: Lyle Dorsett, curator of the Wade "Christian Writer's" collection at Wheaton College, and J.H. McClatchey, an English professor from the same institution. Michael Coren, an English journalist, addressed the conference as a Jew looking at Chesterton and the accusations leveled at G.K. because of his brother Cecil's anti-Semitism. In many ways, Chesterton's admirers form a body universal; Chestertonian Catholicism is an ecumenical movement in itself.

The tow–truck fellows couldn't get the Matador started, so I was towed to the all-night station down near the lake. It was there that I met my three companions for the evening, three automotive comforters who would console me with their mechanical wisdom: Hewey, Dewey, and Lewey. I called my wife at 12:00 and told her not to wait for me. My evening was in the hands of God.

Now Chesterton says that "every man is an allegory. He is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." And I don't doubt for one minute that this is true. In each of these automotive mavens one could see the reflection of his Maker. And, excluding the pagan notion of chance, I realized that I had been thrown into their presence for a purpose.

Hewey, for instance, was a parable of the common man, a decent chap who pumped gas and seemed to mind his own business. He appeared to be the only one who took in money. Perhaps he was the only one who could count.

Dewey, an oriental chap, was my mechanic. One didn't doubt that he was thoroughly familiar with his copy of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. He could hear the sound of one cylinder clapping. He grinned a lot and shook his head: "Won't work. Can't get it to work," he motioned at the engine. How true. This high priest of technology had hit upon a truth to which I could give full assent. That old Matador seemed to have fought its last fight.

Lewey, who, to be truthful, had a screw loose, kept talking to himself, muttering about what a rotten world this is. He was one of those people who always seem angry. Damn this, damn that. He kept asking me about various aspects of the engine. It was all Canadian to me. He'd flick his cigarette, utter an oath, and storm off.

I felt like Job. I was robbed of everything familiar, suffering under the weight of possible financial ruin, given three comforters who could not comfort. Behind my worries concerning this world's trivialities was a hidden player, the mysterious God who ordains all things. Like the character Sunday in Chesterton's *Man Who Was Thursday*, our Maker sends us cryptic notes in the events of our lives. Nothing happens without cause; nothing exists that is not used to reflect his glory. Even the rebellious sinner unwittingly reflects his divine origin; as Chesterton says in his poem *Ultimate*:

> "I am," he says his bankrupt creed;
> "I am," and is again a clod:
> The sparrow starts, the grasses stir,
> For he has said the name of God.

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Is the family in America an outdated relic of the past?

Is the intact nuclear family now just a memory from days gone by . . . a vestigial social form that was, at best, oversentimentalized and, at worst, a narrow prison, forcing men, women, and children into stereotypical roles that stultified freedom and individuality?

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. . . Why does so much tax money go to support families headed by single females while childless couples who want to provide a good home can't find children to adopt?

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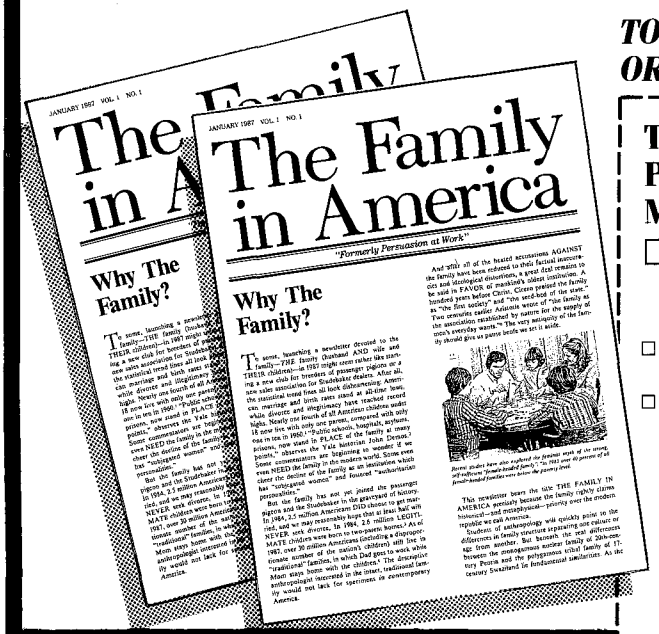

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After cleaning and properly tightening the solenoid, the electric arcing stopped. Nevertheless, the car still wouldn't start. Hewey, Dewey, and Lewey scratched their collective heads and decided it was the starter. Dewey did the grunt work and replaced the burned out unit. Sure enough, the dead engine would now crank, but it wouldn't start. It was something more than the starter. Maybe it was in the fuel line . . .

The memorial dinner was marvelous, and, like most formal affairs, had been opened with prayer. Immediately, a toast was offered. "To the Queen!" For a second I paused. I couldn't remember the protocol for Americans. Do we toast foreign potentates? But then I thought, what the heck, she's a fine old girl, and after all, she is a mother. And who wouldn't toast his mother. And anyway, you can't consider a British sovereign a potentate. So I raised my glass to Bess II. I felt like a character out of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and realized that something needed to be said in defense of our parochial little Republic. I flashed a bicentennial glance at my table and raised my glass a second time. "To the Constitution." We dined.

The tow-truck men had mentioned that the area of the garage was dubbed Hooker Row. Ladies of the night, apparently, plied their trade when the police allowed. I saw none, though I could discern the proverbial flashing red light from a house window a block away. I remembered the words of Solomon to his son: "The lips of the adulteress drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall. . . . Her feet go down to death. . . . Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well." I couldn't remember anything Chesterton had said about chastity, but knew he would have agreed with Solomon.

Ian Boyd, the tall thin priest and editor of *The Chesterton Review*, was the spirit who made the conference succeed. There was nothing of the Chesterton figure in him, nor of the Father Brown. He seemed to know everyone, and it's quite possible he did. Everyone I talked to had either correspondence with him, or had just talked with him. His vibrant, high-strung spirit seemed always ready to share his love of Chesterton with everyone.

Elihu the Albanian arrived around 3:15. He towed cars for a living and apparently was a mechanic as well. He walked over to my car, listened for a moment, and gave the diagnosis: timing chain. Elihu was a shrewd man, and he shared his insights into economics as well as free automotive advice. He had nothing good to say about the Collectivists in his Communist homeland. "I came here with $125 in my pocket; now I own my own tow truck and can work when I want. If I want more money, I work harder. If I want to take off, I stop working." I could not help but think of Chesterton's idealistic distributism as this fellow talked. This man had come from poverty, socialism; he now lived well through the benefits of Western economic enterprise, capitalism. Why was it that a great spirit and mind like Chesterton's couldn't understand the wealth-producing mechanism of free enterprise? He certainly knew that socialism wouldn't work—witness his constant debates with Shaw. But, the distributism he proposed seemed just like a form of inefficient capitalism. Maybe he had had a bad experience as a child with a capitalist nanny. Well, we must allow our lovable avuncular mentors their hobbyhorses.

Hewey added up my bill. Including the tow, three hours work, a new starter, etc., etc., the bill came to $179. He had Elihu check the figures. Maybe he couldn't add after all.

As I left the service station and my comforters, I glanced at the name of the street. The name of the avenue was Fleeceland. How appropriate. I had not been fleeced—having stood over my mechanics, I knew they had done their best. But I was indeed the Jason of my house. In a Chestertonian sense, I knew that I had found a fleece, a golden fleece of patient good-natured adventure in a strange land. And I was bringing back to my family the news of my great discovery. And this was my Chestertonian treasure: Truth can be found all around us—in a piece of chalk, in a hat blown away by the wind, in a literature convention, and in a broken-down car in an all-night gas station on a lonely roadway somewhere in Toronto. All one had to do was look.

That is what Chesterton taught me.

James L. Sauer is Director of Library at Eastern College.

Letter From Albion

by Andrei Navrozov

The Art of Regicide

H.R.H. The Duchess of York wore a blue and black top, with a navy-blue belt, over a black, knee-length leather skirt. The female figure which stood before her was wearing a ball gown consisting of a bodice and skirt of pale eau-de-nil panne velvet decorated with vertical stripes of sequins and lace inserts embroidered with jewels; the bodice had a low neckline, short chiffon sleeves, a dipped waist, and a slightly pouched front over a pointed flange in the waistband, while the skirt was flared, pleated in at the back, with a train. In her right hand she held a mother-of-pearl fan, with a silk leaf painted in shades of gray and blue water-color with an overall pattern of butterflies. Yet, everyone's eyes were on the duchess.

"She is very lovely and so fashionable," said Madame Olga Zamyatina, whose husband, His Excellency Leonid Mitrofanovich Zamyatin ("Of course you know the Russian Ambassador"), was so helpful in organizing the exhibition. It was in this pleasant atmosphere that "Russian Style: Court and Country Dress 1700-1920 From the Hermitage" opened its doors to the British public on January 28.

On the morning of January 29, with pictures of the duchess (and some of her favorites from among the 120 exhibits) gracing the front pages of the morning papers, there was more good news. Standard advertisements, in the business sections, announced "Russian Compensation" beneath the familiar Dieu Et Mon Droit crest of Her Majesty's Government: "The Foreign Compensation, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Registration and Determination of Claims." It read:

> A fund of about L46 million will become available for distribution to those who can

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> satisfy the claims of the Order. Claims may be made by . . . original British or Commonwealth claimants or their successors in respect of financial and property claims arising before 1939 which were registered . . . between 1918 and 1951.

With characteristic understatement, which seems to pervade even public announcements, H.M. Government went on:

> It is not possible to forecast what percentage of the assessed value of successful claims will be paid.

Nevertheless, in a news article, *The Times* quoted Mr. Tim Eggar, "a junior minister at the Foreign Office," who said with satisfaction that "quite a few people will find themselves rather wealthy." It was further reported that the "settlement" had been negotiated by Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Foreign Secretary, and Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet foreign minister, in July 1986.

According to *The Sunday Telegraph*, arrangements for the "Russian Style" exhibition had been made in January 1986. The Barbican Centre's "ruddy-cheeked and exhilirated" young curator, quoted by the *Telegraph*, disclosed in passing that the initiative had come from the Soviet Ministry of Culture. After that, what stood in its way was "a lumbering bureaucracy, rather than sinister tones of Le Carré." But all that was now behind: The two Ministries of Culture have finally pulled it off, complete with the duchess in leather.

It is quite obvious that Sir Geoffrey Howe's "Russian Compensation" agreement was meant as a sideshow for the "Russian Style" extravaganza, by every account the social event of the season. The new generation of Soviet public-relations specialists have a complex and colorful agenda of priorities; there is little doubt that high on that list is the directive to emphasize the "Russian" idea as a component of Soviet policy. To communicate with the West—that is, to deceive it—effectively, is it not better to rely on existing Western "perceptions of the Soviet Union" than on their own disinformation, homegrown for export? Western "perceptions" are all there, ready to do the job, in idiomatic English (or French, or German); they are being churned out daily, by professors, alumni, and students at Ivy League universities; they are published by the *New York Times* and *Foreign Affairs*; they fill books and speeches. Why invent reasons for the invasion of Afghanistan? Open an eminent Sovietologist's treatise, and you will see that it has something to do with the ways of the Russian soul. Soviet nuclear superiority? Well, the Russian passion for grandeur, of course. Think of their novels. The contemplated conquest of the rest of Europe? Traditional paranoia.

The exhibition, which closed at the end of April, extended from "Peter the Great to 1920." Why 1920 and not, say—to pick a year—1917? That, of course, is the whole point, as far as Soviet propaganda is concerned. Nothing's changed. Let Russia be Russia. Vodka, samovar, ICBM: These are our Russian quirks, and we want to keep them.

The press, on the whole, agreed. John Russell Taylor, writing in *The Times*, did think it "intriguing to consider by what routes these amazing

THE SOUTHERN REVIEW

■ SPRING 1987 ■

Significant items for your spring reading list

"If Wolfe maintained his identity as a Southerner, it was because he knew he belonged nowhere else."—A revealing essay on "Thomas Wolfe and the South" by David Herbert Donald.

"There is little or no relation between the religious and the intellectual in modern times precisely because there was little or nothing left of the intellect when the Enlightenment philosophers got through with the human mind."—A challenging look into "The Dark Rooms of the Enlightenment" by John Finlay.

Other essays by Henry W. Russell, Ted R. Spivey, David Robinson, Cushing Strout, Russell Nieli, Max Putzel.

An important reconsideration of the novels of William Humphrey by Gary Davenport.

A chapter from Walker Percy's new novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*, and "The Business Venture," a new story by Elizabeth Spencer. Other stories by Jude Roy, Martha Lacy Hall, Jack Sharman, Charles Erwin.

Poems by Rosanne Coggeshall, James Whitehead, William Page, Neal Bowers, Don Keck DuPree, Anthony Robbins, Paul Ruffin, John Daniel.

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relics arrived in the Hermitage . . . whether from aristocrats who stayed on and changed their ways, or from mountains of the officially confiscated and the privately looted," yet in the end, perhaps wearied by the unpleasant realization that the distinction between the two was more blurred than he as a decent Englishman could allow himself to suppose, he concluded that it was:

> touching as well as paradoxical to see how immaculately they are cared for by the children of a regime which must be diametrically opposed to all that they stand for.

The children of the regime, I am certain, took careful note of Mr. Taylor's probing, suggestive, cooing "must be." Opposed? Well, yes, perhaps a wee bit opposed, but certainly not diametrically!

Alas, the conquest of Europe means England, Barbican Centre and all. The thought of the Duchess of York shot in a cellar, perhaps in a remote Sussex village (I wonder if this island has an equivalent of Ekaterinburg), is sad, but not as sad as the thought of seeing that ingenious blue and black costume of hers displayed at the State Museum of Ethnography of the Peoples of the USSR under a lending arrangement with the State Hermitage Expert Purchasing Commission. Contrary to Western perceptions, in addition to nuclear superiority, those children of the regime have a sense of humor.

Andrei Navrozov is poetry editor of Chronicles.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

Just One More Drink of Water

A recent *Time* article reported an astonishing new find. Researchers at the Monell Chemical Senses Center and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine have discovered that men are good for women.

Actually, there's more to it than that—what they really found out, or think they found out, is that regular relations and, more specifically, male body odors have a healthful effect on fertility, menstrual cycles, and menopause—most revolutionary news.

The mysterious link between men and women has been explored for eight years by Winnifred Cutler, a biologist and specialist in behavioral endocrinology. At first, years ago, Cutler found that having sexual intercourse at least once a week, with a man, was important for a woman's reproductive health. After her latest study, it appears that what's almost (but not quite) as good as sex is what Cutler calls the "male essence," subtle sex aromas known as pheromones.

Men and women exude pheromones, and one pheromone can smell another as if it had fallen into a vat of Evening in Paris. Scientists have known for long that pheromones affect physiological behavior. Women's cycles in convents and college dormitories (on old-fashioned campuses) and between roommates who spend little time with other people, tend to run synchronously. And now Cutler has shown that, contrary to public opinion, the most important part of a man's body, for women, at least, lies under his arms.

In her experiment, seven men and women wore underarm pads for 18 to 27 hours a week over a three-month period. Then "soups" of "aromatic essences," one from the women's armpits and one from the men's, were cooked up. When the "essence" of men (eat your heart out, Bill Blass!) was mixed with alcohol and applied to the upper lips of sex women with abnormal cycles, who weren't at the time, um, dating anyone, their cycles sped or slowed toward a 29.5 day average. (B.O.-uillon distilled from *women's* sweat tended to make the cycles of female volunteers synchronize with each other.)

Granted, these results may not be complete or conclusive. Cutler, for obvious reasons, had few volunteers, and many questions come to mind. For example, was the *same* underarm pad worn by each sweat donor for all three months? If so, what was the empirical effect on *their* sex lives? And if male sweat determines female fertility, which explains the large families of farmers and coal miners and steel workers, where do the Kennedys fit in?

As for the guinea pigs, my own feeling is that a woman who would consent to have armpit soup dabbed daily on her upper lip is irregular in more ways than one.

What's really interesting, though, is Cutler's recommendation to women who have what men like to call "female problems." The simplest solution, you'd think, would be for men to just stop wearing deodorant (which, unlike soap, serves no hygienic purpose) in the workplace and in elevators, thus making women healthier, if not happier. Or—my preference (but perhaps this is *too* revolutionary)—she could have simply told women to find a terrific guy and marry him.

Cutler, however, is nothing if not attuned to the mind-set of the 80's. She says, "My dream is that manufactured male essence, in creams, sprays, or perfumes, can dramatically alter the well-being of women." To this end we and the Japanese are engaged in a mad race for research and marketing rights, and Cutler's partner predicts that in three to five years women may be able to treat themselves to a therapeutic bottle of artificial male sweat. Who says money can't buy happiness?

All of this reminded me of something, and it took me a while to figure it out. When our young son wants to avoid going to bed, his imagination and energy are boundless. He hides. He tries to distract us by pointing out, noisily, in sudden astonishment, the extraordinary details of a book or toy he hasn't touched in months. He giggles, he pouts, he roots his feet to the floor or ricochets off the walls, making the 20-foot trip to bed 100 miles long. And it's all done with a kind of sad desperation because, bone-tired, he knows what's inevitable. Like all six-year-olds, he finds Mother Nature a pain in the neck; the only rules he likes are the ones he invents himself.

Most people, by the time they reach adulthood, have learned to lie back and enjoy it.

Jane Greer, married to a terrific guy, edits Plains Poetry Journal *and is author of* Bathsheba on the Third Day *(The Cummington Press).*

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SCREEN

The Three Sisters

by Katherine Dalton

***Crimes of the Heart*; written by Beth Henley; directed by Bruce Beresford; De Laurentiis Entertainment Group.**

When Perseus went to slay the monster Medusa, advice and presents from Minerva and Mercury were not enough; he had to seek out the Graeae —three crones with but a single prized eye they shared between them, which Perseus snatched in order to force them to help him. They were helpless without it, bound inextricably to each other by their need for it and the bit of understanding it gave them of the world.

Not quite so wizened or foul-tempered, but equally bound to each other, are the three crazy MacGrath sisters. There's Lenny, the old maid (played by Diane Keaton); Meg (Jessica Lange), the wild one, gone off to try to get herself a singing career in Los Angeles; and the youngest, Babe (Sissy Spacek), the little lady of the family, the one who married well, and the one who's just shot her husband.

In the stomach, and she doesn't want to talk about it. "I didn't like his stinking looks," she says, and clams up. Brought back together by the emergency of Babe's arrest, the three sisters are incomplete without each other, each needing the support or needling (or both) of the others in order to come to terms with some small demons that threaten to turn her head or life inside out. Babe's doing crazy things with a black boy, Meg with seemingly just about any boy, and Lenny's feeling half mad because there's no boy at all. Most of their trouble has its roots in a daddy who left them when they were small and in a mother who one day hanged herself and her cat right there in the very basement. Each in her funny way has come home to excise those ghosts —too many men and her mother's death for Meg, a sour marriage for Babe, and for Lenny, the fear there's no more to the future than the present.

Henley has a good ear for catching or recreating those moments when the sublime or deadly serious is torpedoed by the ridiculous. It's the same urge we sometimes have to laugh out loud even though our best friend is in tears. In one scene, Meg trips in after a night out with Doc Porter (married to another woman now) to find her sisters at the kitchen table looking pretty blue. They try to get a word in edgewise to tell Meg that Grandpa's worsened and may be about to make a final exit, but Meg whizzes on, wrapped up in her own business as usual, blithely making jokes about giving Grandpa a stroke by finally coming clean with the truth about her nonexistent screen career. Babe and Lenny, still trying to get through, dam the tide, set Meg down and tell her the news, finally start to giggle. Meg plows on, and before long her sisters are howling. After a long night at the hospital they've reached a level of tension that must find release in either laughter or tears, and for them it ends up being laughter —garish but correct. It's dear, really, we like them so much for it, and after a minute everyone in the audience is hooting, too.

Lange is adequate and no more as Meg; Keaton endearing but too northern and dressed too much like a Southern variation on Annie Hall as Lenny. Spacek, the best actress of the three, does nicely as Babe; my only complaint is that I've heard that same exact Southern accent in *Coal Miner's Daughter* and *'Night, Mother*. The speech coaches have yet to learn that there are as many Southern accents as there are hollers, practically, and that the really tricky thing about Southern speech is that some of it is so quaint and thick that if you put it on the screen nobody would believe it existed.

Very good is Tess Harper in her supporting role as bossy ol' cousin Chick, smug and tart and just full of herself in a way that's maddeningly well done. Also good is Sam Shepard as Doc Porter; oddly enough, in *Crimes* it's these secondary characters and some of the throw-away lines that play better than the main themes or bigger stars.

"Oh, for a beaker full of the warm South," wrote Keats. With another place in mind. But it still applies to "all the Souths" because the South (unlike the North) is a many that makes up a whole, a thousand real McCoy small towns in Alabama and a thousand others, the Souths of somebody's imagination.

There are places and especially people even in the border states that are, like their accents, so quietly eccentric you couldn't make up anything odder. When a movie is set in Mississippi, as *Crimes of the Heart* is, it actually doesn't matter if the screenwriter or costumer or set designer get the details right. It's a nice effort on their part if they do, of course, if only because they so rarely do, but talent and imagination have a way of making up for research. For *Crimes of the Heart*, accuracy or lack thereof is not the movie's problem. Author Beth Henley is a transplanted Mississippian alive and well in L.A., and there's a good bit to her characters that rings very true

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and very Southern. There's also a certain slickness to the overall production and some of the performances that rings false—for Henley a few hits and for director Bruce Beresford a few misses.

But all in all the film is funny and worth seeing. Nevertheless, the problem with *Crimes* is that like the majority of successful plays (which is what it was originally) it's a piece of writing utterly dependent on the production. To expect otherwise, granted, is to hold this nice, funny, solid play up to an improbable if not quite impossible standard. But a play should, ideally, be readable as well as actable, literature as well as drama, something complete on its own as well as something more than a vehicle for its actors. Oh well. "Nothing is certain about masterpieces," said Stravinsky somewhere, "least of all whether there will be any." It would be foolish to complain: as a vehicle *Crimes* works very well.

Katherine Dalton writes from New York.

STAGE

Those Enigmatic Steppes

by David Kaufman

As one sign of Chekhov's greatness, his very name is invoked (in adjective form) to assess the work of others. But even while *Chekhovian* has been called into service on numerous occasions—in recent years, for example, to epitomize such disparate playwrights as Lanford Wilson and Beth Henley, or a bit earlier to position Lillian Hellman and Neil Simon—it remains hard to define what "Chekhovian" really means.

Approaching the difficulty more directly, we see just how deeply it's rooted throughout the century. In *The Russian Point of View*, her discussion of Chekhov's stories, Virginia Woolf circled the horizon like some breathless but grateful eagle that had visited the top of the mountain, before pouncing on the problem by submitting that Chekhov "raise[s] the question of our own fitness as readers. . . . We need a very daring and alert sense of literature to make us hear the tune, and in particular those last notes which complete the harmony." In the same vein, Howard Moss refers to "the vagueness [that] is typical of our relationship to Chekhov in English." Contemporary playwright Corinne Jacker claims, "We still can't do Chekhov successfully most of the time. We don't know how to listen to him, and we don't know how to show what he's saying to the audience. Eighty years and we still can't hear this great artist."

What are we to make of this towering, enigmatic figure of world literature who has left behind over 4,000 letters, 588 short stories, and a handful of plays? Though there *are* only seven full-length plays, and thus far only four that seem to matter, there are those who feel Chekhov is second only to Shakespeare. (Tolstoy felt Chekhov was Shakespeare's superior; but, as Ian McKellen summarizes it, Chekhov is "every British actor's second-favorite playwright!") To complicate the already confused situation, it took 50 years since his death for his writing to be published in a coherent fashion; and that 20-volume edition, completed in 1950, was in Russian. It required an additional 30 years for his *oeuvre* to be collated in its entirety, comprising a 30-volume edition. Such an undertaking has yet to be performed in English.

In England Chekhov was slow to catch on. In 1912 we find John Palmer taking his peers to task by exclaiming, "Chekhov's career in London is disgraceful for all concerned. As one of the most celebrated European dramatists he could not be altogether ignored by the various societies whose mission it is to discover for their members the acknowledged masterpieces of dramatic literature. Nevertheless, Chekhov's first appearance was not in London, but in Glasgow . . . *The Seagull*." Though Desmond McCarthy was a champion of Chekhov as early as 1914, by 1917 Leonard Woolf offered an iconoclastic view in the *New Statesman*, suggesting that, "The precision of Chekhov's realism masks the mental stammer which afflicted him when he contemplated life." In 1920 Shaw, who was notorious for considering himself Shakespeare's better, challenged his readers to "Compare my play *Arms and the Man* with Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, and if you do not at once perceive that the Russian play is a novel and delicate picture whilst the pseudo-Bulgarian one is a simply theatrical projection effected by a bag of the oldest stage tricks, then I shall form a very poor opinion of your taste." But in all deference to Shaw's more characteristic hubris, he would later dismiss Chekhov's four most important plays as "fascinating dramatic studies of *Heartbreak House*."

Accounting for Chekhov's stature in the intervening years remains a puzzle—something only a Chekhov could begin to sort out. He is generally perceived as fiercely apolitical, but his guileful 1890 journey to expose the conditions in the penal colony on Sakhalin Island and his public statements regarding the Dreyfus affair are both famous instances of his taking a stand. Still, the grandson of a serf, he never battled for any of the political causes that drew his peers from one type of injustice to another. To all evidence, he enjoyed his lifelong practice as a doctor, and he also resented it, for the time it denied him to write more. While he generally considered himself unworthy of the supreme literary reputation he quickly achieved, he was wounded by the frequently poor critical receptions his plays initially received. According to some reports, he was unusually outgoing and cheerful, while others portray him as solitudinous and pensive.

Perhaps the most cogent statement was presented by Ronald Hingley in his 1976 biography, *A New Life of Anton Chekhov*: "That human personality is ultimately an enigma this enigmatic genius has demonstrated again and again in his works. Is there any reason why we should expect him to have contravened his own norm in his own life?"

Now we have a newer and more felicitous biography by Henri Troyat: *Chekhov*, translated from the French by Michael Henry Heim and recently issued by Dutton. As others are finding it, Troyat's accomplishment is a paragon of casual biography. Shrewdly assimilating others' legwork and building on their findings, Troyat avoids appearing academic—his version of Chekhov's life reads more like a novel

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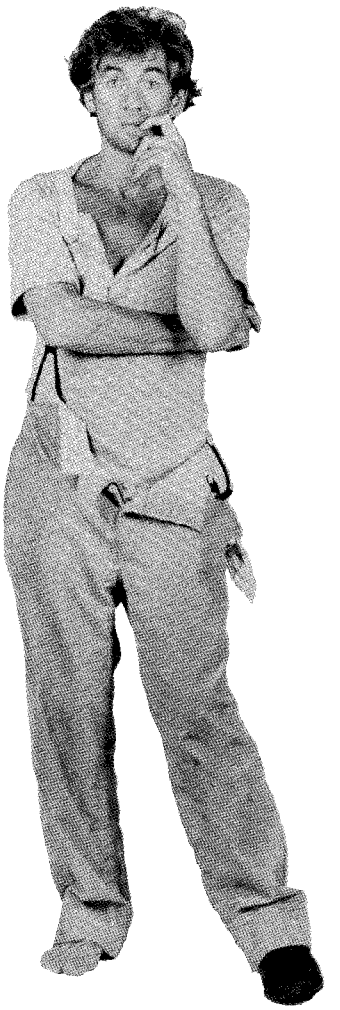
than the scholarly work that it is.

While Troyat does nothing to disturb the previous less than consistent views of Chekhov, he emphasizes two aspects of his life as a powerful subtext suggesting Chekhov was deserving of sainthood. During his youth, he suffered his father's notorious tyranny —including daily beatings supposed to build moral character. Yet Chekhov (unlike his brothers) never spoke ill of his father nor relinquished his youthful respect for him. As we knew before, Chekhov became not only the family breadwinner but also the adviser to his five siblings and both his parents. In addition, he suffered the hideous side-effects of a long-term bout with tuberculosis, which ultimately killed him in 1904, at the age of 44.

The most interesting secondary figure in the Troyat biography is neither Chekhov's severe father nor his adoring sister, but Lydia Avilova, a would-be paramour. Five years Chekhov's junior, Avilova was already married and the mother of a year-old boy when they met in 1889. Her sister's husband was the owner of a St. Petersburg newspaper, one of the many that published Chekhov's stories. In one respect, she strikes us as a Frieda who failed to leave her husband and run off with D.H. Lawrence. In another, she seems as much a literary curiosity as Carrington was for Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury circle.

Curiously, Chekhov's response to Avilova's affections alternates between neglect and enticement—mostly in correspondence. As Troyat summarizes the relationship in its late development, "The oddest of Chekhov's epistolary relationships remained the one he kept up with Lydia Avilova. On the one hand he refused to acknowledge much less accept her love; on the other he seemed unwilling to cast her off once and for all."

In retrospect, it is easy to dismiss Avilova's passion for Chekhov as exploitation. An aspiring writer herself, she would have seized the opportunity to meet Chekhov when he was 29 and already a prominent literary artist, as Troyat implies. But in doing so, he does not sufficiently clarify why Chekhov nurtured her affections to the degree he did. And reading Avilova's adoring memoir, *Chekhov in My Life*, a chapter-by-chapter description of the 15 years of their meetings, intrigues, and correspondence, one is struck not only by her naiveté but also by Chekhov's well-documented attentions.



Ian McKellen, star of Wild Honey, *a comedy by Michael Frayn, from the play without a name by Anton Chekhov, which appeared at the Virginia Theatre in New York. Photo by Frederic Ohringer.*

What might be a key to this most peculiar literary relationship surfaces not in the biography but in Chekhov's first play, written at least 10 years before meeting Avilova but not discovered until 1920—16 years after his death—when it was found as a manuscript without a title. Troyat notifies us that this text, usually referred to as *Platonov* (after its scoundrel/hero) but with a number of titles over the years, was actually a first draft. Chekhov's final version of it was presented to the Little Maly Theater in Moscow by Chekhov's brother Mikhail. Upon learning of its rejection, Chekhov impulsively destroyed the text and, as far as can be ascertained, apparently forgot that this earlier draft even existed.

In its most recent incarnation, *Platonov*, projected at seven hours though never produced in its entirety, has surfaced in a shaved translation by Michael Frayn, titled *Wild Honey*. Running for two hours, it has closed after a mere few weeks on Broadway, following a far more successful run of over a year in London. While the production, and particularly Ian McKellen in the lead role, were justifiably reprimanded for trivializing the text, Frayn's script was not criticized.

Seeing the play shortly after reading Troyat's biography, one notices remarkable similarities between Chekhov and his first dramatic protagonist, Platonov, conceived by Chekhov probably when he was a medical student. Though it may seem ludicrous to speculate on the author's own behavior during his later life, on the basis of a character created during his youth, there is compelling evidence suggesting Chekhov was capable of either predicting or determining his own fate.

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Platonov is presented as a shameful cad pursued by the four main female characters within the play. We learn from Troyat that, at various periods in Chekhov's life, "All the women more or less in love with him knew one another and despised one another under the most friendly of exteriors"; also that Chekhov "was not averse to the idea of several young women lusting after him. He called them his 'squadron' and himself their 'admiral.'" In another instance, Troyat writes, "The preliminaries were what interested him most in love; he saw them as a self-sufficient game." And even later he tells us, "If Chekhov borrowed a good deal from the lives of others for his work, 'The Lady with the Dog' shows he could also borrow from his own experience. For was he not thinking of himself when he wrote: 'He always seemed to women other than what he was, and they loved in him a man who instead of being himself was someone created by their imagination, someone they had eagerly sought all their lives; even later, when they saw their mistake, they went on loving him. And not one of them had been happy with him. Time passed, and he went on meeting women, having affairs, and parting, but he had never loved; call it what you please, it was not love.'"

If, as Frayn and others have suggested, Platonov is reminiscent of Hamlet, then his indecision is most noticeable in relation to the various women who vie for his affections. This theme of the passive-aggressive roué also emerges later in *The Seagull*, when Trigorin, the elder novelist, is reluctantly seduced by the young romantic heroine. In *Wild Honey*, Platonov is besieged by four types of paramours: a virgin, a widow, a married woman, and his own wife. It's too tidy a package not to have been deliberately chosen by Chekhov to represent every conceivable type he could fit into his story. But to compare Platonov's romantic behavior —his chronic vacillation between seduction and submission—with Chekhov's own throughout his life as described by Troyat, is to assume that Chekhov had determined his own fate by prefabricating his own character. It's as if he practiced the life he conceived when he was 21 (or possibly even younger) for an older, fictitious character. A more logical explanation may be that he instinctively recognized who he was and then proceeded to fulfill his destiny. In any case, there is much to suggest that *Wild Honey* is autobiographical in a curious, anticipatory way—and that it deserves far more attention than it's received thus far, as a result of Frayn's accomplishment.

If Platonov is the epitome of a scoundrel who invites countless affections without really delivering, it's hard not to notice other implications figuring in Chekhov's life. Despite Frayn's contention, in his introduction to the published version of *Wild Honey*, that the main character Platonov "is not really like anyone else at all; he is not even remotely like his author," the play not only confirms the similarities but suggests still other autobiographical connections that, as far as I can tell, have not been detected before.

Regardless of the outstanding question of when the play was written (either when Chekhov was 18 or 21), Chekhov obviously had his provincial experiences in mind.

Two of Chekhov's three brothers escaped the family and their strict paterfamilias by moving to Moscow while Chekhov was an adolescent. Some years later, Chekhov's father also stole away to Moscow, abandoning his wife, his daughter, and his son Anton. (Interestingly enough, Chekhov, Tennessee Williams, and as we learn now from *Broadway Bound*, Neil Simon, were all "abandoned" by their fathers—perhaps *the* trauma that makes for lifelong drama.) Chekhov's mother and his sister followed the father to Moscow within a few months. But Chekhov, who was 16 at the time, remained behind on the family homestead, though it meant living as a guest in what used to be his parents' house. He did not move to Moscow himself until three years later.

A special reading of *Wild Honey*—a title Frayn lifted from his translation of the text—suggests that through Platonov, Chekhov projected himself into a

BOOKS IN BRIEF—SEX AND THE FAMILY

Housing the Elderly, edited by Judith Ann Hancock, New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research. A valuable source book on demographic and economic trends in an aging America. Unfortunately, the contributors are overly eager to meet the needs of the elderly through political initiatives and are reluctant to look at the cultural diseases—materialism, statism, Malthusianism, and feminism—that have driven down our birthrate so low that there are too few young to care for the old.

The Communal Experience of the Kibbutz by Joseph Blasi, New Brunswick: Transaction Books; $14.95. A thorough examination of the changing social and political conditions within an Israeli kibbutz. Symptomatic of the readjustment of utopian dreams to stubborn realities is the abandonment of unisex ideology within the kibbutz and the voluntary return to largely traditional sex roles.

Mothers in Prison by Phillis Jo Baunach, New Brunswick: Transaction Books; $19.95. A depressing look at mothers who "do" drugs while waiting for the next visits from their children: It is not just the sins of the *fathers* that are visited upon the heads of the children.

Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Great Britain, 1800-1939 by Lionel Rose, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul/Methuen; $33.00. Scholarly light on a dark subject. Although the research is painstaking and convincing, the reader may have doubts about the appended moral that "the death of 'surplus' or unwanted babies was a biological necessity at a time when birth control was scarcely understood."

Choice and Circumstances: Racial Differences in Adolescent Sexuality and Fertility by Kristin A. Moore, Margaret C. Simons, and Charles L. Betsey, New Brunswick: Transaction Books; $19.95. The authors demonstrate their professional credentials in explaining the differences between black and white sexual attitudes and behavior. But when it comes to moral questions, they prove to be less reliable.

Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand by Claire Duchen, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul/Methuen; $12.95. It's a long and dreary descent from "vive la différence" to lesbian demonstrations in Paris. The best news Duchen has to offer is that once in power, French feminists (like their American counterparts) often forget about ideology in order to pursue private ambition.

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hypothetical future. Platonov's incubus is his feeling that his potential for greatness has rotted, unstimulated by his "godforsaken" "mudhole" of a relentlessly provincial town. Moscow as panacea is broached in the last scene, when it is waved before Platonov like a carrot by the wealthy widow Anna, who tries to regain him by offering to sponsor his settling there.

In accord with such a reading, Chekhov's first play becomes his creative self-justification for moving to Moscow. As Troyat's biography makes exceedingly clear, Chekhov's life always exhibited a remarkable wanderlust. While Troyat preserves Chekhov's reputation of appearing content and even self-effacing, his well-documented urge to be precisely where he wasn't belies some of his famous complexity and enigma. Even during his final months the tedium would overcome him, and he would make the long journey from Yalta to Moscow, despite his frail and failing condition.

The seeds for at least this aspect of his life were planted in his first dramatic fiction, through which he seemed to have exorcised his possible, provincial future. Bearing in mind that Chekhov was roughly 21 when he wrote the play, this notion of autobiographical projection appears confirmed when Platonov, 26, claims in the first scene, "I wonder you recognized me. The last five years have ravaged me like rats [at] a cheese. My life has not turned out as you might have supposed." Later he despairs of his situation further: "I shall be the same when I'm forty, the same when I'm fifty. I shan't change now. Not until I decline into shuffling old age, and stupefied indifference to everything outside my own body. A wasted life. Then death. And when I think of death I'm terrified."

In his response to the recent Broadway production, Frank Rich rhetorically asked, "Mr. Frayn picked the title 'Wild Honey' because of the play's hothouse erotic tensions, but where is the spark between Ms. Walker (or any of the women) and Mr. McKellen?" The play itself, like so many of Chekhov's later works, is essentially a treatise on boredom; and all of Platonov's halfhearted trysts with his "women" are to ward off the tedium they all share. In the midst of widow Anna's maneuvers, near the play's end, to win back Platonov's affections, she learns that her stepson's wife is having an affair. With whom, she wonders, could it be? "There's no one in this miserable little place to be in love with! There's only the doctor. She's not in love with the doctor! There are only a few elderly landowners and a retired colonel and . . . oh, no!" A process of elimination instantly leads her to suspect Platonov, but she is so desperate to occupy her time that she will not permit anything to interfere with her own designs.

Such is the context and the subtext —conveying the boredom in the romance seems as integral a part of the play as it was of life. As Graham Greene observed in response to Tyrone Guthrie's 1941 production of *The Cherry Orchard*, "Chekhov's work is not young: it is as old as the strange land from which it emerged . . . twisted by sickness, boredom reels towards Yalta to die."

David Kaufman is a theater critic in New York City.

MUSIC

Meistersinger

by Dale Volberg Reed

***Divo: Great Tenors, Baritones, and Basses Discuss Their Roles* by Helena Matheopoulos, New York: Harper & Row; $25.00.**

To an opera lover, a guided excursion through the mysterious world of the opera singer is irresistibly appealing. Are opera singers merely brainless, egotistical voices? Do voice teachers and vocal techniques make a difference? How much do opera singers worry about acting, about musical interpretation of roles? Helena Matheopoulos, author of *Divo*, is an enthusiastic, generally competent guide, and the tour she provides is fascinating.

The organization is by vocal ranges, which provides continuity between chapters: We discover, for example, why Faust is an easy role for Nicolai Gedda and difficult for Alfredo Kraus; why the Duke of Mantua is a young tenor's role but Radames is dangerous for a young voice; why, of 32 B-flats Radames sings, only one is really difficult; why singing Parsifal could make a tenor lose the voice for Rodolfo.

Rather than simply transcribe interviews, Matheopoulos has written a narrative about each singer, combining biographical material with lengthy quotations from the subjects as well as observations from other members of the operatic world. I am delighted to report that this is not a gossipy book. Biographical details are reported only when they are relevant to the singers' training and development.

Divo is not a "page turner" or even a "good read." It must be read slowly. Balancing reading with listening would help make abstract and possibly esoteric topics like vocal color and *tessitura* much more immediate. The author's turgid style does not make reading any easier. Often her clumsy sentences reflect fuzzy thinking. She would have been well served by a stringent copy editor, who could also have caught her occasional inexcusable errors in musical terminology.

Divo is graced by a small selection of excellent photographs, all but one showing the singers performing roles they discuss in the book. The one priceless exception is a photograph of Pavarotti dressed for a costume party as a sheik, with shades.

This is a serious, honest book about dedicated men at the top of their profession. They are clearly—sometimes surprisingly—intelligent and thoughtful, often highly articulate, and impressively hardworking. The book offers an admirable antidote to many old stereotypes (though a music lover serious enough to read this book already knows the stereotypes are false).

Divo will inevitably find its audience. Real opera fans will relish its revelations and forgive its flaws. General readers, if they can tolerate a certain amount of obscurity (chiefly unelaborated references to roles, operas, or composers) may be interested in this intimate view of genuine craftsmen at work. Excellence in almost any field exerts a fascination of its own.

Dale Volberg Reed is a piano teacher, an amateur harpsichordist, and a choir singer.

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